

“Exploring the impact of a parent-designed
family literacy programme in a DEIS primary
school on family literacy practices, home-
school relationships and confidence”

A thesis submitted to
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin
for the degree of Doctorate in Education.

May 2024

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School of Education

Declaration

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May 2024

Abstract

Research title: "Exploring the impact of a parent-designed family literacy programme in a DEIS primary school on family literacy practices, home-school relationships and confidence"

Maria Kennedy

This doctoral research is set in an urban DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) band 1 primary school (a school at risk of educational disadvantage) in Ireland and explores family literacy, home-school relationships and educational disadvantage. This action research was conducted considering Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory and offers a mechanism to interrogate the complex interactions involved in family literacy programmes by considering the 'process', 'person', 'context' and 'time'. By collaborating with a group of parents of children in first class in the school (known as the Parent Expert Group (PEG)) to design a set of tailored family literacy workshops for parents and children in Early Start and junior infants, this research provides an understanding of how this type of support may influence a) family literacy, b) home-school links and relationships and c) parental confidence and capacity to support their child's language and literacy development. Opportunities for democratic dialogue were prioritised, and a methodology that valued the participant's voices and experiences was implemented. This research endeavoured to take a non-deficit stance, welcoming all input from participants as shared constructors of this set of family literacy workshops.

Twenty-eight families attended the PEG-designed workshops. Workshop participants engaged in semi-structured interviews, pre and post-workshop. The key findings show that the strong pre-existing home-school relationships in this disadvantaged school were fostered, family literacy practices were developed, the language and literacy development of the children and their families was supported, and parental confidence increased. This research facilitated opportunities to increase parent's capacity to recognise themselves as their child's primary educator, a key aim of the Home School Community Liaison scheme in Ireland. Furthermore, it has highlighted parents as partners in their child's education and operationalised this in a viable and valuable way. This research was a success, as outlined by parents and has implications for policy, practice and future research. The findings oppose the literature that takes a deficit stance on family literacy and parental engagement in areas of low socio-economic status and instead highlights the motivations and interests of these parents in supporting their child's language and literacy development.

Keywords: Family literacy, parental engagement, home-school relationships, partnerships in education, educational disadvantage, action research, Home School Community Liaison

Summary

This qualitative action research study set out to explore family literacy and home-school relationships in this urban DEIS band 1 primary school in an area of educational and socio-economic disadvantage. The research was conducted with the parents of the children in Early Start (a preventative preschool intervention scheme offered to select DEIS schools for children aged 3 and 4 who are at risk of not reaching their full potential through the school system), junior infants and first class as the participants and was carried out through a bioecological lens. By designing a set of tailored family literacy workshops with the parents of the children in first class (the Parent Expert Group), this research aimed to increase family literacy practices in the homes of the participants, encourage strong home-school relationships between these families and the school and increase parental confidence and capacity to support their children's language and literacy development.

This innovative research provided opportunities for democratic dialogue through the use of a methodology which valued and placed importance on the participant's own voices and experiences. This action research offered a unique methodological stance by prioritising the PEG as a mechanism to develop already strong home-school relationships and family literacy practices. It encouraged parents to be active collaborators and participants. This research incorporated the ideas of the parents of children in first class and placed them as co-designers of this workshop programme through the use of a focus group discussion and demonstrated their expertise as their child's primary educator.

Further data was collected for this research through the use of semi-structured interviews, both pre and post-workshops. Parents who attended these tailored workshops and participated in the post-workshop interviews reported the many benefits that they, their children and their families experienced as a result of attending these workshops. Parents can often see their own practices and capabilities in a deficit manner; however, this research reinforced for parents that they are doing a fantastic job in supporting their children's language and literacy development and highlighted that they have a wealth of knowledge and are indeed experts. This research developed parent confidence and allowed opportunities for parents to enjoy quality time with their children. It gives the reader a clear picture of

the rich family literacy practices happening in the homes of the families who partook in this research and the varying opportunities and practices that children are exposed to. By engaging in this research, parents were encouraged to name all of these practices specifically and identify themselves as their children's primary educators. This research facilitated opportunities to increase parent's capacity to recognise themselves in this role, a key aim of the HSCL scheme. The research also highlighted the strong pre-existing relationship that exists between the homes of these families and the school, naming the HSCL as an important player. Overall, parents reported that this study was a success.

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Dissemination of Research

Elements of this research have been presented at numerous academic conferences in the past number of years including:

- The American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting in Chicago, April 2023
- The Teaching Council Annual Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence in Dublin, October 2022
- The Association of Teacher Education in Europe Annual meeting in Dublin, May 2022
- The Trinity College Postgraduate in Education Conference in Dublin, May 2021 and May 2022
- The Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) Research Conference in Galway, November 2021

I was invited to be a keynote speaker at the NALA Family Learning Conference in November 2022, where I presented elements of this doctoral research, as well as my practice as a Home School Community Liaison (HSCL). I also facilitated a workshop at this conference with other HSCLs, family learning tutors and others on my research, sharing key ideas from this research that could be used in other settings.

This research has been selected for two awards namely:

- The Teaching Council John Coolahan Research Support Framework Bursary, 2022
- The INTO Bursary for Doctoral Research in the Area of Educational Disadvantage, 2020

This research laid the foundations for my involvement in co-authoring an academic paper which was published in the Irish Educational Studies journal titled *“Home School Community Liaisons (HSCL) perspectives on supporting family well-being and learning during the COVID- 19 school closures: Critical needs and lessons learned”* (Ross, Kennedy and Devitt, 2021).

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List of Abbreviations

AR- Action Research
ASD- Autism Spectrum Disorder
CSL- Children's School Lives
CSO- Central Statistics Office
DEIS- Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DoE- Department of Education
DES- Department of Education and Skills
EAL- English as an Additional Language
ERC-Educational Research Centre
ESRI- Economic and Social Research Institute
ETB- Education and Training Board
HSCL- Home School Community Liaison
INTO- Irish National Teachers Organisation
OECD- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
NALA- National Adult Literacy Agency
NAMER- National Assessment of Maths and English Reading
NCCA- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NESF- National Economic and Social Forum
NIACE- National Institute of Adult and Community Education
PAR- Participatory Action Research
PDST- Professional Development Service for Teachers
PEG- Parent Expert Group
PIRLS- Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PPCT- Process Person Time Context
SCP- School Completion Programme
SCT- Sociocultural Theory
SES- Socio-economic Status
TCD- Trinity College Dublin
UN- United Nations
UNESCO- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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1 Introduction

Chapter 1 introduces the research undertaken for this Doctorate in Education briefly. Section 1.1 introduces both the research topic and the researcher. The research context is outlined in section 1.2, considering the educational and social context of the urban primary school in which this research takes place. The rationale for this doctoral research is presented in section 1.3, outlining both personal and professional motivations and gaps in current research that aim to be addressed. Section 1.4 outlines the three research questions which underpin this research. Chapter 1 concludes with a thesis map outlining the order in which the various elements of this study will be presented.

1.1 Introduction to the Researcher and the Research

“Parents are the experts in their own children”.

(National Adult Literacy Agency, 2010, p. 34)

I, the researcher, am a qualified primary school teacher working in a DEIS band 1 (a school deemed to be at the greatest risk of educational disadvantage- see section 1.2.1 for details) vertical primary school in an urban area for nine years. I have worked in this school since I completed my Bachelor in Education in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, in 2014. My mother is also a teacher and both she and my father fostered a love of learning in our home from a young age. I have taught the infant classes for six years and have worked as a Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) for three years. During this time, I have developed a deep interest in children's early literacy and language development. Due to my experience in the infant classes, I have formed a particular interest in the emergent language and literacy phase of development and the importance of parental engagement¹ and involvement in this critical phase. Teaching in an area of socio-economic disadvantage has encouraged me to consider the home learning environments of children who may be at risk of experiencing socio-economic and educational disadvantage. I completed a Masters in Education in

¹ Throughout this research, the term 'parent' is used most frequently. It should be acknowledged that I am acutely aware that there is a variety in the composition of families and that this is respected; however, for the sake of this research, the term 'parent' will be used regarding the child's primary caregiver.

2018 in Trinity College Dublin, focussing on the home literacy environments of low socio-economic status (SES) families in the DEIS band 1 urban primary school in which I work titled '*A Study of Parental Engagement with Home Literacy Practices and School Supports in an Area of Disadvantage*'. The rich and descriptive qualitative data that was generated for this thesis sparked an interest in delving deeper into the area of family literacy² and parental engagement and further scaffolding the children, parents and families in this DEIS band 1 school (see section 1.2 for research context). Working as HSCL has allowed me to develop, both personally and professionally, through this unique role and has deepened my interest in the importance of providing opportunities for parental collaboration and engagement in education, something which I am incredibly passionate about. My love for research, knowledge and positive change has been the driving force that has pushed me through completing this doctoral research.

This doctoral research is a project of exploration and is based in the context of my work as Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) in this urban vertical DEIS band 1 primary school, which is deemed to be at the greatest risk of educational disadvantage. The research has been carried out with the parents of children in Early Start (a preventative preschool intervention scheme offered to select DEIS schools for children aged 3 and 4 who are at risk of not reaching their full potential through the school system), junior infants and first class as the participants, under the framework of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (see section 2.2). This study aimed to empower a group of parents, known as the Parent Expert Group (PEG), to contribute to the co-development of a series of family literacy workshops designed to develop the family literacy practices of other parents in the school community and to support these parents in scaffolding their child's emergent language and literacy development, while building their confidence in supporting their children. The integration of family and parent input in the child's learning and development, as well as cultivating interest in home-

² The importance of language is central to this thesis and for clarification purposes, it should be considered that the term family literacy is used in the case of this research as the primary focus is on literacy, both formal and informal. However, the term family learning is often also appropriate to describe the activities done in the home and programmes which are run to help support these activities.

school partnerships in this urban DEIS school, was explored throughout this research. The PEG consisted of six parents who came together for a focus group in November 2021. This group of parents and I worked collaboratively on this Action Research (AR) in the 'planning' stage to design a series of family literacy workshops for parents from the Early Start and junior infant classes. The content and design of these workshops were based on the recommendations of the PEG, as well as relevant literature and guidelines in effective family literacy practice. These workshops were offered to all parents with children in the Early Start and two junior infant classes in the academic year of 2021/2022. The workshops began in May 2022 and lasted four weeks, the 'action' phase of this action research cycle. Twenty-eight families engaged for the four weeks. Pre and post-workshop interviews were conducted with the participants who engaged in the workshops in the 'reflection' and 'evaluation' stages of this action research. These interviews determined the thoughts and reflections of these parents in relation to their child's language and literacy learning, their family literacy practices, their confidence in scaffolding this, barriers they experience and their thoughts on home-school relationships in the school. Post-workshop interviews also explored parent's thoughts on engaging in the family literacy workshops, outcomes they identified and characteristics of effective family literacy programmes. Informal field notes were taken throughout the workshops to observe which content was most engaging, identify any appropriate changes, and reflect on the content.

The qualitative action research undertaken for this doctoral thesis focuses on uncovering the understanding, uses and needs of family literacy with a group of parents within this school community. I am not from the local area in which this research was set, and I am not a parent, therefore I thought it was imperative to include the voices and opinions of the parents of children in this school as key collaborators and active participants in this action research. A primary aim of this study was to articulate these parent's views on their current family literacy practices and establish what meaningful supports might be designed to respond to their unmet needs in terms of nurturing their own, their families and the school community's language and literacy potential. This exploratory research aims to raise awareness of the non-curriculum learning that happens in these families' homes and provide evidence of what these families who may be deemed to be 'disadvantaged' contribute to the learning process. Another primary aim of this

thesis, which was carried out through the lens of Urie Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (see section 2.2), was to develop the proximal process of family literacy practises with parents and children in Early Start and junior infants in this school context. The 'person' characteristics of the children and parents were considered throughout, both as influences on and outcomes of development, as was the 'context' (research carried out with parents in a DEIS primary school focussing on positive home-school relationships) and the 'time' factors (a four-week programme taking place in the aftermath of COVID-19) which were at play, all of which are explored in great detail throughout this research.

1.2 The Research Context

As outlined, this research takes place in a DEIS band 1 urban vertical primary school where I work as HSCL. The school has an enrolment of 220 children from mainstream junior infants to sixth class, including two special classes for children with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and an Early Start class that has an enrolment of twenty preschool children. The school employs twenty-one teachers, including a full-time HSCL, an administrative principal, and ten special needs assistants. The school is recognised as having pupils who are at risk of the highest level of educational and socio-economic disadvantage.

When looking at the immediate context for this research, the urban area in which the school is located (and in which the majority of the children who attend the school live) is deemed at risk of educational and socio-economic disadvantage. The presentation of this contextual data aims to acknowledge the challenges that may be faced by some children, parents and families in the area. The following data is taken from the 2016 census figures (Central Statistics Office, 2017) and outlines that the area where this primary school is located has rich history and culture. As stated, it boasts a diverse community with residents from various parts of the world. According to the census 2016 data, 33% of the population in this area were not born in Ireland, and 32% have a nationality other than Irish, with the national average standing at 12%. This is reflected in this school community, which, at the time of writing, has children who speak twenty-nine different languages, with almost 50% of the pupils speaking English as an additional language. The area has a transient population due to a high number of

emergency accommodation facilities for families experiencing homelessness and a high number of International Protection Accommodation Services.

The area where the school is located is deemed disadvantaged, with a high proportion of the population leaving school with no qualifications (primary level or less). Other indicators of disadvantage in this area, which are listed, include unemployment levels, higher rates of lone parent's households and local authority housing tenure compared to the national average (CSO, 2017). A key source of data when looking at social inclusion and community development is the Pobal HP Deprivation Index for Small Areas (HP index). The HP index uses data compiled from the National Census to profile the level of deprivation in localities and communities. According to the Pobal HP Deprivation Index (Pobal, 2024), the local areas in which the children who attend the school in which the research took place live are diverse. The HP index states that these areas vary from extremely disadvantaged, to very disadvantaged, to marginally below average to marginally above average. The comparison tool on the Pobal maps section of the Pobal website outlines that the general area in which this research takes place has become increasingly disadvantaged between the years of 2016 and 2022. A number of areas in which the children live, including a number of the local flat complexes in which a high number of the children live, have been deemed extremely disadvantaged and very disadvantaged in the 2022 HP Deprivation Index.

According to a document published by the Department of Education titled *The Refined DEIS identification model (2022)*, the data sources used in the DEIS identification process for primary schools in Ireland include the Department of Education's Primary Online Database (a nationwide database which holds the information of each child in each school) and the Central Statistics Office (CSO) data from the National Census of Population as outlined in the Pobal HP Deprivation Index. The above data and profile of the area in which the school is located, and the areas in which the children who attend the school live, warrants the classification of this school as a school which is deemed to be at most risk of educational and socio-economic disadvantage, DEIS band 1, a concept which will be explored in section 1.2.1.

1.2.1 DEIS schools

Since 1970, schools in Ireland whose children come from areas at risk of educational or socio-economic disadvantage have received varied supports, all of which were consolidated in 2005 with the *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) action plan, a programme launched by the Department of Education to prioritise social and educational inclusion (Department of Education and Skills, 2005). The goal of this programme, which is still implemented in Ireland today, is to address educational disadvantage and disparities between varying SES groups in our education system by providing a more strategic and cohesive approach to tackling the inequalities that children from areas at risk of educational or socio-economic disadvantage face in school. The programme pays particular attention to the educational disparities that may exist between children from low-SES backgrounds and their peers from other backgrounds and aims to address these disparities. DEIS primary schools are allocated one of three bands- urban band 1 (schools with the highest level of concentrated disadvantage), urban band 2 (schools with high levels of concentrated disadvantage) and rural DEIS (rural schools with high levels of concentrated disadvantage) (DES, 2005). The DEIS scheme has been reviewed since its formation and in July 2023, the Minister for Education announced that the OECD will review the DEIS scheme and its allocation to schools, with an aim to inform educational policy in Ireland. Perhaps the outcomes of this will alter the manner in which educational disadvantage is tackled in our education system in the future. Currently, the DEIS programme offers schools targeted measures to tackle inequalities that they may face, including increased funding, lower teacher-pupil ratios, increased staffing, increased provision of services and training, targeted literacy and numeracy programmes and the HSCL scheme, which is central to this research and is outlined in section 1.2.2.

1.2.2 HSCL Scheme

Many various schemes have been put in place across different countries to encourage parental engagement and involvement in their child's education (Axford et al., 2019), one of which is the HSCL scheme in Ireland. I, the researcher, currently work in the role of HSCL in the DEIS band 1 primary school

in which this research takes place. The HSCL scheme is available under the DEIS framework to all DEIS band 1 schools and is operated by Tusla Education Support Services (TESS). In line with Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, the scheme aims to promote positive partnerships in a child's mesosystem between the home, school, and community and promote positive interactions between the key players in a child's life. The belief that parents are the child's first and most important educators is at the forefront of the HSCL scheme. The central aim of the HSCL is to "ensure that good communication and positive relations are fostered and developed between parents and teachers in primary and post-primary schools and community support services, with an emphasis on children at risk of educational failure" (Irish National Teachers Organisation, 2009, p. 12). This scheme aims to ensure the inclusion of parents, families, and communities as a means of combating educational disadvantage. It also aims to reduce the impacts of educational disadvantage through prioritising partnerships between the home and the school, as is central to this research (see section 2.5).

The HSCL scheme, which began in the 1990s under the *Disadvantaged Areas Scheme*, is based on a Freirean approach to education and community development, whereby Freire (1970) outlines that "transformation is only relevant if it is carried out with the people for them" (p. 43), an idea which is central to this doctoral research. The HSCL scheme was further developed in the *DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion* (DES, 2005) and has five central aims. Firstly, the scheme promotes maximum active participation of parents in the learning process, particularly those who might be at risk of educational disadvantage. The scheme strives to ensure cooperation between home, school and community in a bid to improve the educational attainment of children who attend DEIS schools. Thirdly, the HSCL scheme seeks to raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist parents in developing relevant skills to support this progress. Children's retention in the education system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and the promotion of positive attitudes to life-long learning are important aims of the scheme. Finally, the scheme aims to disseminate the positive outcomes of the work of the HSCL throughout the school system (Home School Community Liaison National Team, 2009).

As outlined, one of the key objectives of the HSCL scheme is to raise awareness in parents of their own capacities and resources to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist parents in developing relevant skills to support this progress, as is a central aim of this research. The HSCL focuses on supporting and collaborating with target families at risk of educational disadvantage. The *Information Booklet for DEIS schools participating in the Home School Community Liaison Scheme* outlines that the scheme is "solution-focused, building on the strengths of parents and carers through empowerment and capacity building" (Department for Children and Youth Affairs, 2019, p. 6). Developing parent confidence and capacity to support their child's learning is a crucial element in the role of the HSCL and is a key element to this doctoral research.

Concepta Conaty (2002), the scheme's founder, outlines the twelve guiding principles of the HSCL scheme. Four of the principles are of particular relevance to this research and outline the importance of the following:

- prioritising partnerships and collaboration with parents
- identifying needs and aiming to meet those needs
- fostering independence and self-help
- promoting change and acting as an agent of change

These principles and the five central aims outlined above underpin the ideas at the centre of this doctoral research. The HSCL scheme has been cited as a model scheme for parental engagement and as being "unique in Europe" (Walsh et al., 2022, p.84). It is an effective scheme which is valued (O'Toole, 2016) (see sections 2.3.3.2 and 2.5.2.1). The role of the HSCL strives to ensure equity and equality in education is prioritised for all children and families and will be discussed in further detail in later chapters.

1.3 Rationale for this Doctoral Research

The rationale and motivation for this doctoral research come from personal, professional and contextual influences, which will be outlined in this section.

The rationale for this research takes into consideration many contextual factors. The role that I currently work in as HSCL is a role that is somewhat unique to the Irish Education system as outlined above, and from my experience

is one of which many people both in the education sector and outside are not aware of. It is a vital role in schools at risk of educational disadvantage; however, little research has been carried out either by HSCLs or about the work that HSCLs do in Ireland. This research aims to highlight the importance of the role of HSCL, to fill this gap in the research and to promote the importance of engaging families in their children's education and development while acknowledging and valuing their capacity as educators. Furthermore, this research aims to explore the positive relationships between the school and the parents and families in this DEIS band 1 school.

As outlined above, personal motivation for this doctoral thesis came from previous research I engaged in for my Masters in Education (see section 1.1), where my research delved into the home literacy environments of parents of children in the junior infant class I was teaching at the time in the same school where I now work as HSCL. These parents spoke about their literacy practices at home, family literacy practices that they engage in and their thoughts on the home-school relationships in the school at the time. This thesis provided rich and detailed qualitative data in which parents shared their ideas and also sought advice on how best to support their children's language and literacy development. This sparked the idea to design a tailored set of family literacy workshops for parents in this unique school community (a school which has children from twenty-nine nationalities and is at risk of educational disadvantage). Educational disadvantage is heterogeneous, and programmes need to be specific for particular groups. There is no 'off the shelf' model for family literacy, and programmes are not always transferrable (Eldering & Vedder, 1999; Manz et al., 2010), an important element that is considered throughout this research. According to Goodall and Vorhaus (2011), best practice to ensure a positive impact of programmes combines meaningful home-school relationships, culturally appropriate support, and an accessible and welcoming environment, all of which were key priorities for this research. With this in mind, the idea of the PEG was formed, whereby the considerations, thoughts and opinions of the parents and families who are experts in their own children was prioritised. This research focuses and builds on the participants' strengths by providing opportunities for empowerment and confidence building amongst them. The idea of schools in Ireland providing opportunities for genuine engagement and partnership with

parents (as is an integral aim of this research) is one which little is written about and, therefore, is identified as a gap in research which this doctorate aims to address.

Several studies have examined children's literacy levels in Ireland over the past two decades. This doctoral research considers, in particular, the research which focuses on children at risk of educational disadvantage who attend DEIS band 1 schools in Ireland. Eivers, Shortt and Shiel (2005) argue that there is a clear association between educational disadvantage and literacy achievement in Ireland, stating that children from low-SES backgrounds seem to over-represent those with literacy difficulties. In 2004, the research published by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) stated that there was emerging evidence that 27%-30% of children from disadvantaged areas in Ireland presented with literacy difficulties, with the average reading achievement of children from DEIS schools being lower at this time than children who attended non-DEIS schools (Eivers et al. 2005). This study outlined that the children who expressed positive attitudes to reading, read for fun, had access to books at home, visited their local library, and were read to before starting school had higher average scores than their peers (Eivers et al., 2005). The recommendations from the report suggested that raising teacher expectations, further supporting schools to place a stronger emphasis on literacy, prioritising early intervention and promoting parent-school interactions were ways of addressing literacy difficulties that children in Ireland faced at the time (the latter two being of particular interest to this study). More recent research, including the *Child Literacy and Social Inclusion* report published by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) (2009), highlighted that children in primary school from disadvantaged communities were at risk of serious literacy difficulties and that in order to address this, an integrated approach would be needed, as is the focus of this research.

In 2014, the *National Assessment of Maths and English Reading* (NAMER) was conducted to assess children in 2nd and 6th classes in urban DEIS band 1 and 2 schools and urban non-DEIS schools. The findings in this report showed that a substantial gap continued to exist between the reading levels of children in DEIS band 1, 2 and non-DEIS schools. The assessment was carried out again in 2021 (which was delayed due to COVID-19 school closures and lockdowns), and the findings showed that the gap still exists between DEIS and

non-DEIS but had not widened in this time (Neils & Gilleece, 2023). This in itself is an important finding, despite evidence which claims that children from low-SES families were worst affected by COVID school closures (Darmody, Smyth & Russell, 2020; Weidmann et al., 2021) and learning loss occurred worldwide (Education Policy Institute, 2021). The report outlining the NAMER results from 2021 showed that 43.2% of children who attend DEIS schools are at or below a level 1 in reading achievement; however, there was an improvement in the percentage of children in DEIS schools who are at a level 3 (Neils & Gilleece, 2023). The findings from NAMER in 2021 highlight the levels of educational disadvantage that still exists in schools with designated DEIS status (Neils & Gilleece, 2023). The findings emphasise that continued literacy provision and supports are needed for children who attend DEIS band 1 schools.

Other measures of literacy can be found in international reports such as the *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (PIRLS) (2016), which assessed the reading levels of primary school pupils in 57 participating countries, showing that Irish pupils had high reading achievement scores and were amongst the highest in the EU (Neils & Gilleece, 2023). PIRLS results from 2021 show that the average reading achievement of children in Ireland is now amongst the highest in comparison to other participating countries in the world (however, COVID-19 school closures and the times of testing in various counties should be considered when interpreting these results (Delaney et al. 2023)). Although the above findings are positive, the existing achievement gap between children in DEIS and non-DEIS schools still requires intervention and support. As is the case for this research, opportunities for genuine collaboration with parents and families with a focus on developing skills, confidence and practices aim to tackle the achievement gap and engage parents and families in their children's education and development; this research aimed to do so, focusing on family literacy.

In conclusion, the rationale for this research was derived from personal and professional motivations. The context in which I work and in which the research takes place is considered, as is past research which has taken place in this context. National and international considerations are explored, and gaps that this research aimed to explore are outlined.

1.4 Research Questions

Given the context highlighted above, including the lack of empirical understanding of the impact of family literacy programmes in DEIS primary schools, this thesis addresses the following research questions:

1. According to parents from an area of disadvantage, what are the pre-existing family literacy practices carried out in their homes, and why are they motivated to engage in these practices with their children?
2. What are the barriers and enablers to engaging in family literacy practices and programmes for the families who partook in this research?
3. What outcomes are identified by parents who engaged in these co-designed tailored family literacy workshops?

1.5 Thesis Map

As outlined in the sections above, the thesis begins with a brief introduction to this doctoral research. The research context is presented in section 1.2, outlining the social and educational context in which this research was set. The rationale and motivation for the study are explored in section 1.3, while the research questions are presented in section 1.4. This thesis map provides structure for the reader and outlines, in order, the main elements which will be explored in this doctoral research.

The literature review for this research, as presented in chapter two, delves into the existing research in the areas of educational disadvantage, literacy development (in particular family literacy) and home-school relationships. The theoretical framework for this research, Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development, is outlined in detail in section 2.2, with brief considerations given to other relevant theories. Section 2.3 explores educational disadvantage, focusing on challenging the deficit viewpoint associated with educational disadvantage, and interventions which aim to address this disadvantage in Ireland. Literacy, in particular family literacy, is discussed in section 2.4, where definitions, research, benefits and barriers to family literacy activities and programmes are outlined. SES and literacy development are considered. Home-school relationships, parental involvement and engagement in education and the importance of

building partnerships between the home and the school are presented in section 2.5. The chapter concludes with a summary and conclusion in section 2.6.

Chapter three, the methodology, outlines the various elements of the research design for this qualitative study. The chapter begins by outlining the research questions in section 3.2. Section 3.3 explores the use of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory as a lens in which this research was designed and carried out. Next, a brief exploration of the chosen research paradigm, critical theory, is presented in section 3.4. Qualitative research is discussed in section 3.5, while section 3.6 outlines the chosen research approach, action research. The data collection methods and instruments used in this research are presented in section 3.7. The chosen data analysis approach is examined in section 3.8. Triangulation, trustworthiness, validity and transferability are considered in section 3.9. The critical steps taken to ensure this research was carried out ethically are explored in section 3.10. Finally, the limitations of the study are explored in section 3.11. Chapter 3 concludes with a summary of the various elements of the methodology that were undertaken for this doctoral research.

Chapter four is structured by outlining, in order, the three stages of this action research cycle- the 'planning' (section 4.2), 'action' (section 4.3), and 'reflection' and 'evaluation' (section 4.4) stages. This chapter is structured in a slightly less traditional manner and brings the reader through the empirical steps that were taken for this study, as well as outlining some of the key findings which led to the development of the workshop design. The chapter begins with an introduction to the action research (AR) cycle, focussing on the participants involved in all three stages. Section 4.2, the planning, outlines the PEG as a focus group, setting out the steps taken in developing, piloting and implementing the focus group schedule. The PEG participant's profiles are presented in section 4.2.2.1, followed by an in-depth analysis of the data collected from the PEG focus group. This analysis explores family literacy practices, parent characteristics, home-school relationships, barriers to engagement and advice and content for inclusion in the set of family literacy workshops designed for the parents of children in Early Start and junior infants in the school. The planning section, section 4.2, concludes with an outline of the relevant literature and guidelines that, combined with the PEG findings, led to the formation of the tailored family

literacy workshop schedule. The 'action' stage is outlined in section 4.3, whereby the schedules for the individual workshop sessions are outlined, followed by the workshop participant profiles. The use of field notes informally in the research is touched on briefly. Section 4.4, the 'reflection' and 'evaluation' stages outline the development, piloting and implementation of both the pre and post-workshop interview schedules. The pre and post-workshop interview participant profiles are presented in section 4.4.2. Section 4.4 closes on an important part of this research, my reflexivity and my role as the researcher. Finally, the data analysis process for the research is presented and a summary of the empirical research conducted is outlined.

The fifth chapter, the research findings, focuses on the results gathered from the data collected from the pre-workshop semi-structured interviews (section 5.2) and the post-workshop semi-structured interviews (section 5.3). The three research questions and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory underpin the research findings and are considered throughout chapter 5. In brief, the findings show that these PEG-designed and tailored family literacy workshops were a success, as reported by parents, with numerous benefits for parents, children and the school. Parents are engaged and motivated to support their children's language and literacy development, and report increased confidence since attending the workshops. Home-school relationships are strong in the school and have been strengthened through this research process. Findings are organised by data set and are presented thematically. A brief conclusion summarising key findings from this qualitative research is presented in section 5.4.

The discussion chapter, chapter six, explores how participants' responses and reported practices compare and contrast with the literature outlined in the literature review chapter, highlighting commonalities and differences between the data gathered for this research and previous research done in the area. The discussion is thematically based, and the emerging themes are discussed after a critical analysis of the data collected for this research was undertaken. Section 6.1 introduces the chapter, with section 6.2 delving into a critical discussion on family literacy. Section 6.3 explores home-school relationships, analysing and interpreting the findings and comparing them to the literature in the area.

Chapter seven, the conclusion chapter, summarises the research and presents the key findings. Implications and recommendations for future practice,

research and policy are outlined. A conclusion to this doctoral research is presented.

Finally, all cited literature referenced in the study is listed in chapter eight using APA 6th style. Appendices include information sheets, consent sheets, the focus group schedule, interview schedules, workshop resources, observation rubrics, and non-identifiable photographs, which are presented in chapter nine.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review aims to explore the theoretical framework, key concepts, and existing literature in the areas relevant to this research, namely educational disadvantage, family literacy and home-school relationships. The chapter begins by introducing Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development as the theoretical framework for this research. Other relevant theoretical approaches are also considered in brief in section 2.2. As outlined in chapter 1, this doctoral research is set in the context of an urban DEIS band 1 primary school situated in an area of socio-economic and educational disadvantage, therefore section 2.3 explores educational disadvantage and will present challenges to the deficit viewpoint that is often associated with areas of low socio-economic status. To address the key focus of this study on family literacy, section 2.4 sets out the core concepts of literacy and emergent literacy and considers, in-depth, family literacy practices and programmes. As family literacy programmes happen typically at the intersection of family and home, section 2.5 examines key factors in supporting strong home-school relationships and the importance of ensuring that positive partnerships exist between the home and the school.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides a lens through which the researcher examines a topic. According to Lederman and Lederman (2015), a theoretical framework should help to answer two basic questions:

- What is the problem/question at hand?
- Why is the chosen approach to answering the question feasible?

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development provides the central theoretical framework for this study leaning also on other relevant theories in the field.

2.2.1 Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Human Development

Russian psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development is one which progressed over time (Tudge et al., 2009) and can be described as an "evolving theoretical system" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 793). This theory puts forward a model of how the many varying elements and experiences which affect a developing person's circumstances, context and environment play a crucial role in their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Rosa and Tudge (2013), this theory has evolved from an ecological perspective (whereby the role of context is central to development) to a more bioecological perspective (whereby the developing person is an active agent in his/ her development within this context) over time. The progression of Bronfenbrenner's theory can be considered in loose phases which will be explored in brief in the following section.

In the first stage of the model, which Bronfenbrenner (1979) named the ecological model of human development, the role of the environment in which an individual lives is prioritised. Bronfenbrenner suggests that individuals are affected and influenced by the context in which they are located and that their development is founded on the interactions between themselves and their environment. This bidirectional relationship between a developing person and their environment is dynamic and consists of several nested systems including the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner locates the individual's immediate surroundings such as a child's home, school, and community in the microsystem. Microsystems influence an individual's development and are also reciprocally influenced by the individual. The mesosystem incorporates the relationship and interactions between the elements of the microsystem and ties various microsystems together, for example home-school relationships. The mesosystem construct emphasises that individuals apply learning in one setting across to another setting and the stronger the relationships between these settings the more consistency there is for the individual (O'Toole et al., 2019). Factors which have an indirect influence on an individual's life such as parental workplace and well-being, as well as the wider neighbourhood are positioned in the exosystem. School and community links are also an element of the exosystem, as are school policies and facilities (INTO, 1997). The macrosystem includes factors such as national and international policymaking,

economy and sociocultural beliefs which can also affect the individual indirectly. Elements of the macrosystem can lead to varying levels of pressure and expectations and can have a huge influence on the development of the individual (O'Toole et al., 2019). According to Berk (2008) the exosystem and the macrosystem, although indirectly influential, can help or hinder early development. The outermost layer, the chronosystem, which was added as the model progressed (Bronfenbrenner, 1989), takes the influence of time on development into account and considers the idea of change and continuity over time. Bronfenbrenner states that each system is interlinked and that these systems should support each other (Krishnan, 2010). The focus on the developing individual as an active agent emerged as Bronfenbrenner's theory developed over time, with the earlier version of the model now seen as being overly reliant on context, and not placing enough emphasis on the influence of relationships, person characteristics and time.

Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) place a growing emphasis on the individual over time. This version of the model emphasises the importance of focusing on the individual developing within a series of complex interacting systems. Within this model, the individual is an active agent in their own development and is both influenced by and influences their environments and contexts, meaning that their person characteristics "are both outcomes and producers of development" (O'Toole, 2016, p. 63). Proximal processes are defined, whereby the regular reciprocal interactions between the individual, their environments, and other individuals within these environments are explored. Proximal processes are defined as "the primary engines of development" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 798) and occur in the individual's most immediate environments. In the 1998 version of Bronfenbrenner's model of human development, the Process- Person- Context- Time (PPCT) model was introduced. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) further developed the theory, emphasising the developing person as an active agent in their development whereby all four elements of the model work synergistically and interdependently (Navarro et al., 2022).

The PPCT model looks at how a person's temperament, motivation, personality traits and genetic inheritance are influenced by the varying levels of the bioecological systems outlined in Bronfenbrenner's earlier versions of the

model (O'Toole et al., 2019). Proximal processes (P) occur in the microsystems of development and are defined as increasingly complex reciprocal interactions between individuals and their environment which occur regularly over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). These processes are bidirectional and mean that development occurs through the relationships that are experienced (O'Toole et al., 2019). For the developing individual, proximal processes help them to make sense of the world around them, with the adults in a child's life playing a key role in these processes.

The characteristics of a person (P) (including dispositions, resource and demand characteristics) are considered, whereby the "characteristics both shape and are shaped by experiences in the context" (Hayes, O'Toole & Halpenny, 2017, p. 33). This element of the model is one which adapted as the model developed, placing the learner at the centre as an active agent in their development whereby the "individual is not viewed as a passive recipient of experiences within settings and processes" (O' Toole et al., 2019, p. 7). A person's active behavioural dispositions, including motivations, temperament and persistence are considered, whereby the environment influences characteristics and the characteristics influence the environment (Hayes et al., 2017). Dispositions can set proximal processes in motion and can sustain their operation (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Early experiences are crucial for the development of an individual's dispositions, which are a result of both biological inheritance and interacting contexts (Hayes et al., 2017). Resource characteristics are acknowledged, both mental and emotional resources and material resources. The resources that are beneficial in one environment may not be as beneficial in other environments that an individual experiences. A person's resource characteristics influence their ability to be able to engage in proximal processes and include skills such as language and communication (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Finally, the demand characteristics or qualities of a developing person that can encourage or discourage reactions from a social environment include temperament, gender, race, age and appearance (Hayes et al., 2017). These three types of person characteristics are both an influence on development and a result of development.

The environmental contexts (C) in which the learner lives influence the proximal processes and in turn, the development of the individual (Hayes et al.,

2017). The contexts that an individual experiences are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem from the earlier versions of Bronfenbrenner's theory. The final version of the bioecological model emphasises the importance of the dynamic bidirectional interactions and relationships that guide development in comparison to the earlier models of the theory which focused heavily on an individual's context. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), the focus should be placed on the process and the interpersonal relationships rather than overly focusing on the context: however, earlier versions of Bronfenbrenner's theory identify the importance of context on development, one of the key contributions of this theory to educational theory, research and practice (Downes, 2014). In the PPCT model, context takes both proximal and distal factors which influence the individual's development into account. Proximal factors include those closest to the individual daily such as their family and school, while distal values incorporate sociocultural beliefs and values that are at play for an individual in their context.

The final element of the PPCT model, the time (T) in which the interactions take place influences an individual's development also. Time can be categorised into three different levels; microtime, mesotime and macrotime (Hayes et al., 2017). Microtime describes what is happening during proximal processes, mesotime looks at the extent of the occurrence or the frequency of proximal processes and macrotime takes the historical context into account (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Another aspect of time which is considered by Bronfenbrenner in the earlier versions of his theory is that of 'ecological transitions' which are defined as "changes in role and setting as a function of the person's maturation or the events in the life cycle of others responsible for his or her care or development" (Bronfenbrenner, 1978, p.16). This transition can be one of a normative nature (moving from preschool to primary school) or one of an unexpected nature (for example moving school or a change in the primary caregiver for a child).

This research works within the most up-to-date version of the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) while taking earlier, less dynamic versions into account (Bronfenbrenner 197; Bronfenbrenner 1995). To understand a person's life and development, we must ensure that we consider all four elements of the PPCT model; the person, their processes, interactions and

relationships, the context in which the processes take place and the time in which they take place. The reciprocal synergy that exists between the four elements should also be considered, whereby the outcome of interest is a result of the "joint, interactive and mutually reinforcing effects" of the process, person, context and time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 966). This research aims to do so while paying particular attention to the areas of family literacy development, parental engagement and educational disadvantage. This study is situated at the interface between the school, the home and the child, focusing on the proximal process of family literacy activities supported by a tightly connected mesosystem between home and school.

According to Hayes et al. (2017), Bronfenbrenner is perhaps best known for his model of nested systems, but his work has provided meaningful and considerable contributions to our knowledge of the importance of relationships and interactions in development also. They argue that Bronfenbrenner provides us with a theoretical framework which allows us to bring together a range of different educational perspectives and in turn gives us a multi-theoretical perspective. The most recent version of Bronfenbrenner's theory, the bioecological model, focuses not only on the individual person but also the context in which they live, allowing for a wider sociocultural context to be considered (Greene et al., 2010). It acknowledges that the developing person is an active agent in their own learning and that the opportunities that they are exposed to are often dependent on their context. Development is an interplay between an individual, their environment and interactions (or proximal processes- the term used by Bronfenbrenner to describe sustained interactions over time), all of which are crucial for development.

When considering the development of individuals from varying backgrounds this framework allows us to look beyond the problem-focused deficit narrative where parents and children from low-SES families can be blamed for any educational difficulties which may arise, and such is the reason it has been chosen as the theoretical underpinning for this doctoral research. Bronfenbrenner examines how specific characteristics interact with an individual's environment and contexts, an idea which he refers to as interinfluence (Hayes et al., 2017). His framework provides us with a comprehensive view of how the traits or characteristics of a child and their parents (and the importance of these in relation

to development) are influenced by and interact with their environment. This theory provides an organising principle for this research as well as a theoretical foundation.

Bronfenbrenner's work, although widely accepted, has been met with criticism from theorists in the area. Neal and Neal (2013) argue that the idea of the 'nested' systems in the earlier version of Bronfenbrenner's theory places an excessive emphasis on the individual's context. They suggest that the systems in Bronfenbrenner's theory (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem) should be viewed as 'networked' systems which would allow a more comprehensive outlook on the fluidity and how these systems overlap and interact with each other. Neal and Neal (2013) criticise the concentric circles illustration often associated with Bronfenbrenner's earlier thinking, deeming it misleading. They argue that this illustration implies that development occurs in an order dictated by the location of the system and that a system is a subsystem of the one outside it.

The development of the later versions of the bioecological theory addresses some of the above criticisms and places greater value on the person as an active agent in their development while acknowledging the importance of the interactions and relationships they experience. Although Bronfenbrenner has provided us with an extensive theory in which to view human development, before his death in 2006, he largely failed to provide us with practical research to test his model. He failed to provide clear operational definitions for some of the concepts that are key to his theory and did not provide either a methodological or operational example of his theory (Xia, Li & Tudge, 2020). As outlined by O'Toole (2016), his writing is mostly theoretical and in *"The Bioecological Model of Human Development"* (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), he calls on future researchers to operationalise his model. According to Navarro et. al (2022), studies which operationalise the bioecological model successfully are still in short supply. This study aims not to operationalise Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory but to use it as a lens to design and carry out this research.

2.2.2 Alternative Theories

Section 2.2.2 explores alternative theories that were considered when forming the theoretical framework for this research namely Bourdieu's social theory and sociocultural theory. Both theories will be presented briefly in this section, however, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory forms the main theoretical underpinning for this doctoral research.

2.2.2.1 Bourdieu's Social Theory

Bourdieu's social theory asks us to consider that power is generated culturally and is reproduced (1991, 2003). Bourdieu considers three interlinking concepts in his theory- habitus, capital, and field. When referring to 'habitus', he considers our dispositions, and predetermined mannerisms that we acquire from our socialisation (Bourdieu, 2003). According to Houston (2002) "fundamental life chances are determined by our habitus because it becomes embodied in the way we speak and in our preferred tastes, proclivities and deportment" (p. 157). Habitus is not necessarily fixed, and new experiences within the social context can influence an individual's habitus. Habitus is the impact of our life experience at any moment, and it prepares us for transferring easily into a range of diverse cultural fields (NALA, 2020). For the case of this research, a child's, parent's and families' values as well as language and literacy skills are considered, and the idea that perhaps their home context may not be reflective of that of the schools is also considered. The idea that school is a better fit for some children, parents and families than it is for others clearly illustrates Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1989).

'Capital' refers to the various resources that an individual has access to, namely social, economic and cultural resources and is inseparably linked to context. Possession of social, economic and cultural capital allows an individual to maximise opportunities. Bourdieu outlines that social capital is not confined to members of certain groups but can be acquired by individuals who utilise their social connections and social networks for their advancement (Kyle Ruddick et al., 2019).

The third concept that Bourdieu puts forward is 'field', which refers to the "social and institutional arenas or networks in which actors are socially

positioned”, in which an individual’s habitus is entrenched (Houston, 2015, p.7). Each field has an underpinning set of values and the interactions between these values and an individual’s habitus and possession of capital decides their position in the field. According to Bourdieu, habitus, capital, and fields continually interact with each other and depending on the dominant culture can lead to the individual being advantaged or disadvantaged.

Both Bronfenbrenner and Bourdieu consider the importance of the individual's social context in influencing their development. Similarities also lie in the importance placed on an individual's access to resources from their environment to aid their development. Bourdieu's explanation of capital allows us to delve deeper into the importance of an individual's access to these resources, and the link between them, the individual's social class and their position in their social field. In addition to this, commonalities can be drawn between Bronfenbrenner's various systems and Bourdieu's concept of the field. According to Houston (2015), Bronfenbrenner's systems allow for differentiation of social context, however, his theory does not emphasise the importance of power in comparison to Bourdieu's line of thought. Bourdieu's ideas of social reproduction and the impact of the interaction between habitus, capital and field on cultural superiority and inferiority is one which should be considered when researching educational disadvantage.

This research aims to apply Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory while considering the critical role of power, social reproduction, and societal and cultural conditioning with a Bourdieusian lens, in particular in relation to my positionality and reflexivity as a researcher.

2.2.2.2 Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (SCT) "defines the child as an active member of a constantly changing community of learners in which knowledge constructs and is constructed by larger cultural systems" (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p. 100). This theory goes beyond the idea of nature versus nurture and states that the two are intertwined. Similar to Bronfenbrenner’s theory, SCT acknowledges the influence of external experiences and of the macrosystem on the child. Both theories place emphasis on social and contextual processes (VanLier, 2000). SCT states that

development begins with traits inherited and continues through the “interweaving of cultural and biological inheritances” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 59). This theory focuses on development as social and psychological, placing importance on the context and the culture in which development occurs. The idea that a child's abilities and personality are influenced by their environment, culture and context is central to SCT (Hayes et al., 2017). Furthermore, sociocultural theory places importance on creating community supports to improve child outcomes, which has great relevance to this research. SCT suggests that a child's environment has an important influence on their language and literacy development and although it does not act as the theoretical framework for this research, aspects of it will be considered throughout.

Various theories were considered to form the theoretical underpinning for this research, including both Bourdieu's social theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, both of which have been outlined briefly in this section. Upon consideration, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory was chosen as the underpinning conceptual framework for this research as it is a holistic approach to development which takes the importance of interactions, relationships and environment into account. All of the players in a child's life, as well as the interactions between them are considered in this theory, in comparison to other theories which may not view the impact of the wider environment on development. The bioecological theory allows us flexibility for interrogating a multi-theoretical approach and forms the basis for the theoretical framework for this doctoral thesis which focuses on the areas of family literacy, home-school relationships and educational disadvantage.

2.3 Educational Disadvantage

“Families do not exist in a vacuum”.

(Hegarty & Feeley, 2010, p. 60)

This study is situated in an area of socio-economic disadvantage, in a school which has been designated as at risk of educational disadvantage (as outlined in chapter 1). To begin, section 2.3.1. provides a strong rationale for challenging the deficit perspective that has commonly been associated with research on

educational disadvantage, a key aim of this research. Section 2.3.2 will explore equity in education and will draw on the Irish and international context. Socio-economic status and educational disadvantage will be explored in section 2.3.3, with interventions to tackle this risk of disadvantage outlined in section 2.3.4. The section will conclude with a look at educational disadvantage and SES in relation to Bronfenbrenner's theory, followed by a short summary of the literature outlined.

2.3.1 Challenging the Deficit Viewpoint

A key aim of this research is to challenge the deficit viewpoint that is often associated with educational disadvantage and DEIS schools. According to Volk and Long (2005) the deficit viewpoint "disvalues and discounts" (p. 12) children and families from varying backgrounds and often sets them up for failure by discrediting their cultures or values. Brooker (2002) argues that by seeing people as disadvantaged, they become disadvantaged. A deficit viewpoint within our education system can cause the ideas, expectations, and aspirations of teachers for children from low-SES backgrounds to vary from those of their peers from middle to high SES backgrounds (Miller, Kuykendall & Thomas, 2013) and must be challenged.

The transformational perspective identifies and respects the cultures and values of diverse communities and assumes that these communities possess 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). This viewpoint recognises the work of Freire (1989) and prioritises the transformation of teaching and learning, and the practices of society in general. Challenges and inequalities are recognised, such as barriers to equality in education and society. The transformational perspective prioritises meaningful interactions and active involvement with members of communities who are perceived to be disadvantaged, to gain a genuine understanding of cultures and practices. Volk and Long (2005) claim that educators have the opportunity to challenge power relationships in society by transforming them in their own individual classrooms and schools and reflecting on their own attitudes and assumptions. They argue that by seeing all children and families as "skilful and knowledgeable" (p. 19), we can actively change perceptions and engage in the process of transforming the

perspectives of school communities and society. This research aimed to do so by prioritising the genuine engagement of the participants.

Uni-cultural approaches to challenging the deficit viewpoint do not work effectively, and according to O'Toole et al., (2019), can reinforce deficit perceptions even more. Kim, Fletcher and Bryan (2018) argue that instead, considering approaches which acknowledge the structural barriers that may be at play in schools and the education system, allows for a move towards the empowerment of parents in particular those from minority or low-SES backgrounds. This is of particular relevance to this research which takes a participatory and collaborative approach to recognising, valuing, and prioritising the wealth of knowledge that parents and families hold.

The way in which we view inequality must change to allow for opportunities for equal conditions for growth, rather than equality of opportunity to arise. The language which is used when addressing educational inequalities is critical, as inappropriate terminology and language can facilitate the reproduction of social and educational inequalities (House of the Oireachtas, 2019). Disadvantage in Ireland is multi-layered and occurs both horizontally (through a lack of consistency between reality, policy, and practice) and vertically (whereby various systems influence and impact the outcomes for the individual). Our education system is unfair and unequal according to the *Report on Education Inequality and Disadvantage and Barriers to Education*, which states that certain SES groups and minorities are destined to face additional challenges in relation to education (House of the Oireachtas, 2019). The idea of equity in education is explored in the next section.

2.3.2 Equity in Education

Supporting equity in education is prioritised in policy both in Ireland and abroad (DES, 2005; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2022), whereby policy aims to reduce the association between academic performance and individual pupil background, particularly SES. An OECD report, *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting disadvantaged students and schools- Spotlight report: Ireland* (2012) outlines that "equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, are not

obstacles to achieving educational potential and that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills" (p.2). They outline that the most successful education systems worldwide combine equity and quality. Sahlberg and Cobbold (2021) support this approach to education as it allows all children to receive an education that will enable them to participate to their full potential in society and encourages children from varying backgrounds to achieve similar educational outcomes. They put forward several principles that will enhance equity in education, starting with the importance of educational policy. They stress that educational policy must address educational inequalities and develop in union with economic and social policy while providing the financial, physical, and human resources to do so. They state that curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy practices must be reflective of all members of society and not just the dominant institutional norms. Positive student engagement should be fostered, as well as the importance of student well-being (Sahlberg & Cobbold, 2021). Finally, parental engagement is critical to achieving equity in education, a factor of particular interest to this research (see section 2.5).

The importance of distinguishing between equity and equality in education is put forward by Espinoza (2007). Many policies have attempted to respond to educational disadvantage by prioritising the opportunity for an equal education for all. According to Sahlberg and Cobbold (2021), the equality of opportunity approach to education aims to provide all students from all backgrounds an equal opportunity to pursue their aspirations. Equal access to resources is essential; this approach highlights equal educational outcomes for all. Professor Kathleen Lynch, in the *Report on Education Inequality and Disadvantage and Barriers to Education* (House of the Oireachtas, 2019), explains that the idea of equality of opportunity is not sufficient for challenging inequality in education. She proposes an 'equality of condition' approach, which states that "people should be as equal as possible in relation to the central conditions of their lives, particularly in terms of their material conditions and the exercise of power" (House of the Oireachtas, 2019, p.15). She argues that the current education system in Ireland reinforces inequality by endeavouring to fill in gaps rather than attempting to make conditions equal and ensure equity for all children in Ireland.

2.3.3 Socio-economic Status and Educational Disadvantage

According to Williams and Melchiori (2013), the term social class describes the classification of people in society based on their social capital, values and wealth, where holding the highest economic resources grants the highest power. Various social classes- both advantaged and disadvantaged co-exist in our society. Buckingham, Beaman and Wheldall (2014) define socio-economic disadvantage, or low-SES by considering household income, parental occupation, and parental education. An individual's social, cultural, financial, and human capital resources are defined by their SES (Institute for Educational Sciences, 2012). The Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2016) uses a social class classification to assign class codes to families is based on the level of skill, educational attainment and occupation of the person that the family is dependent on. Buckingham et al. (2014) outline that a child's SES is reflective of that of their parents and family. According to Willis (2000), the idea of social reproduction allows for this perceived advantage or disadvantage to be passed from generation to generation.

Educational disadvantage is defined by the Irish House of the Oireachtas in the 1998 Education Act as "the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools" (House of the Oireachtas, 1998, p. 32). The *World Social Report- Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World* (2020) published by the United Nations, outlines that a quality education is crucial for all members of society to tackle the intergenerational cycle of growing inequality, but that in many cases the education system has failed to do so and instead of tackling inequality has reinforced it.

Education can function as a mechanism to support this social reproduction, and in turn, children from lower social classes may be faced with the additional challenges associated with educational disadvantage. It can be argued that schools maintain a model of social engineering that makes it difficult for students to engage in any movement on the social ladder (Gatto, 1992). Social inequality is reproduced throughout our education system in Ireland according to the *Report on Education Inequality and Disadvantage and Barriers to Education* (House of the Oireachtas, 2019). According to Sahlberg and Cobbold (2021), "schools are in a constant battle against the reproduction of inequality and poverty in society"

(p. 17). Institutional norms in the educational setting are often seen to favour the social and cultural contexts of children born into middle-class families who are already familiar with the cultural tools (for example language, skills and attitudes) that are needed to succeed in education, known as cultural capital (Byrne & Smyth, 2010). For children who are born into families who do not belong to this social context, adjustment to education can mean that challenges arise within their mesosystem. Differences in SES and culture in microsystems can lead to a disconnection in the mesosystem. Tobin, Arzubiaga and Adair (2013) suggest that the idea of the 'clash of the cultures' may exist for these children whereby their home and family culture may differ from the thoughts and expectations of the school. They suggest that for these children and their families (in particular children and families from low-SES, English as an Additional Language (EAL) and minority backgrounds) it can be difficult to uphold their own identity while also attempting to succeed in the school system. Differences in home and school culture and values can cause children to have to adjust, even though children spend only 15% of their time in school.

Bourdieu's (1991, 2003) social theory (as outlined in section 2.2.2.1) theorises this, whereby a child may enter school with an "alternative set of dispositions, embodiment and language code" to that of the school culture (Houston, 2015, p. 8). In an educational setting, if school staff do not recognise the importance of the child's habitus and possession of capital, the risk of the reproduction of inequality is increased. Hayes et al. (2017) suggest that occasionally education systems do not support these children and their families and that a 'mismatch' can occur between the contexts of school and home. They argue that it is vital for educators to identify and respect the cultural and linguistic practices of these families, which are central to their identities, and to collaborate with them to ensure that the mesosystem is supported. In order to achieve cross-cultural competence, contextual awareness is essential and can be attempted by applying Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model while considering Bourdieu's social theory by "working with environments rather than working despite environments" (Fook, 2002, p. 162). Research done by Cregan (2008) outlines the idea of cultural alienation that children of varying SES backgrounds face in school. She explains that school can be a poor linguistic fit for some children who do not have the same language and literacy practices as those that are promoted in the

school setting (see section 2.4). The idea that formal schooling is a better fit for some children, parents and families than for others demonstrates Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1989). This idea will be explored in greater detail throughout this doctoral thesis, specifically in relation to the language and literacy practices of children from areas that are at risk of educational and socio-economic disadvantage (see section 2.4.2).

The structures of exclusion that exist in our education system are explored by Downes (2014). He promotes a change in mindset towards a society that prioritises a more inclusive system. He explores the obstacles to accessing education for children from marginalised groups and introduces the term 'system blockage' whereby he argues that often systems reproduce a cycle of practices and behaviours, an idea that reflects Bourdieu's 'reproduction' (1991, 2003). Various initiatives and programmes have been introduced both in Ireland and internationally to attempt to combat this 'system blockage', with the DEIS and HSCL schemes being of particular relevance to this research.

2.3.4 Interventions to Address Educational Disadvantage

2.3.4.1 DEIS Schools

As outlined in chapter 1, DEIS schools are schools which have been identified as those requiring additional support to tackle the educational and socio-economic disadvantage that the children who attend may face. According to the INTO (2015), "schools cannot address issues of social inclusion on their own" (p. 3), highlighting the need for providing supports for schools in doing so. They argue that the DEIS scheme has provided a more robust approach to planning and evaluation in schools than previous schemes which aimed to tackle educational disadvantage in Ireland and has provided a blueprint for supporting children who are at risk of socio-economic and educational disadvantage.

The importance of 'building pathways' between families, schools and communities in DEIS schools and developing services to support disadvantaged communities in succeeding in education is one which is prioritised in DEIS schools. This is highlighted in the *Report on Education Inequality and Disadvantage and Barriers to Education* (House of the Oireachtas, 2019). The report states the importance of considering Bronfenbrenner's microsystems,

mesosystems, exosystems and macrosystems in which educational disadvantage occurs and emphasises the need for a multi-layered approach to challenging this inequality. The authors argue that a noteworthy gap exists between DEIS and non-DEIS schools (see chapter 1), however they stress that it is essential to note that success should not be measured on educational outcomes alone; factors such as aspirations, attitudes and school climate should be considered also. It states that DEIS schools are designed to compensate for the opportunities often assumed to be missed by children from low-SES backgrounds; however, this thought alone reinforces the idea of deficit and social stratification. The authors conclude that “the education system as it currently stands is unfair and unequal and the consequences of this are stark” (House of the Oireachtas, 2019, p. 20).

The Education (Disadvantaged Committee) Bill, published in 2017, focuses on addressing educational disadvantage through the school system and looks at 9 main areas, three of which will be a crucial priority throughout this study: parental involvement, links with the community and improving literacy and numeracy (Weir et al., 2017). The provision of the HSCL in DEIS schools works to prioritise these areas of particular importance and is explored in detail throughout this research and in section 2.3.4.2.

2.3.4.2 The HSCL

“Home School Community Liaison Coordinators play an essential role in the Irish education system to address systemic educational disadvantage by supporting children and families”
(Ross, Kennedy, & Devitt, 2021, p. 311).

As outlined in chapter 1, the HSCL aims to promote positive partnerships within the child's mesosystem by ensuring good communication and positive relations are prioritised between the home and the school. HSCLs act as a "point of intersection of home, school and community organisations" (Ross et al., 2021, p. 316). According to Mulkerrins (2007), the HSCL scheme is advantageous in bridging what can be, at times, a large home-school gap by collaborating daily with those most at risk of educational disadvantage. The HSCL strives to "build

bridges" between the home and the school for the benefit of the child (Walsh et al., 2022, p.10). The scheme is targeted and is preventative rather than curative (Conaty, 2002).

Where positive, reciprocal communication exists between the home and the school, the HSCL can act as a facilitator for decreasing barriers to learning while encouraging increased attendance, improved academic outcomes and working to ensure that all children and families reach their full potential (Walsh et al., 2022). According to Weir et al. (2018), the HSCL is influential in improving parent's confidence and competence in supporting their children's education, as well as being supportive of parent's own educational achievement (Walsh et al., 2022). Similarly, Archer and Shortt (2003) outlined that the HSCL scheme has positive impacts on the home- school relationship. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2017) define equity in education as "ensuring that there is a concern with fairness, such that the education of all learners is seen as being of equal importance" (p.7), an idea which is central to the HSCL scheme whereby all families, in particular those at risk of disadvantage can overcome barriers and feel valued and supported to reach their potential through the education system.

The role of HSCL is a hugely demanding and highly challenging role in the education system and is one which is of great importance to children, parents and families who are most at risk of educational disadvantage (Walsh et al., 2022). It is a role in the education system which is highly valued by staff, parents and children. Walsh et al. (2022) outline that teaching staff report that the HSCL facilitates the smooth running of the school daily. They note that parents deemed the role to be "vitally, vitally important" (p.10) and a "direct link" or a "safety net" for them, identifying the HSCL as a support mechanism (Walsh et al., 2022, p. 89). The HSCL is a critical player in disseminating good practice to staff in schools whose children are at risk of educational disadvantage (DES, 2019) and is an essential asset to a school at risk of educational disadvantage (Walsh et al., 2022). Although a vitally important role in the education system, little research has been published on the role of the HSCL. This research aims to disseminate the critical work of the HSCL. The role of the HSCL is considered throughout this research and is further outlined in sections 2.4.3.3.3 and 2.5.2.1).

2.3.5 Bronfenbrenner and Educational Disadvantage

Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2006) bioecological theory contributes to understanding the factors and influences that may impact educational inequality and disadvantage and allows us to recognise the importance of diversity in our society and our education system. They state that a family's position in society impacts them and that the bioecological model provides a framework that seeks to support children who may be at risk of facing challenging circumstances. The bioecological model shows the complexity of development, the multi-layered levels of influences, the interdependence of influencing factors and the proximal and distal influences on an individual's development (Hayes et al., 2017).

The bioecological model acknowledges that not all parents and families have the same beliefs, behaviours, attitudes or abilities to allow them to engage in their children's education due to various process, person, context or time elements (O'Toole, 2016). The model allows us to ensure that interventions and supports put in place for families and parents from varying SES backgrounds respond to their specific needs (Hayes et al., 2017) rather than implementing interventions or programmes that are designed around conceptions of what certain groups need (Antony-Newman, 2018), an idea central to this research. Uni-cultural approaches to tackling disadvantage do not work; instead, context-specific approaches that consider structural barriers can work towards empowering parents and children from all backgrounds (Kim et al., 2018). Deliberate, sustained efforts must be made by schools to tackle disadvantage and to ensure that the connections in the child's mesosystem are strong (see section 2.5), as is the case for this research.

Hayes et al. (2017) suggest that occasionally, educators study Bronfenbrenner's theory and conclude that the multi-layered nature of child development implies that supporting this development is out of their control as many other outside factors are at play. Hayes et al. (2017) state that this outlook is futile and promotes a deficit viewpoint. They argue that instead it is essential that all educators fulfil their responsibility to the children in their care, no matter what home environments they experience. They propose that if an adult in a child's life assumes the role of an involved and caring support and forms strong reciprocal relationships with the child, they will be empowered to overcome some of the educational and otherwise challenges they face. They suggest that this

support and relationship and strong connections with the school in the mesosystem can provide a child with early opportunities for social, emotional, and academic development. When the educator identifies and implements optimal conditions for development and has respect and consideration for diversity, the results for the child will be optimal. The ideas outlined in the sections above will be explored further throughout this research.

Section 2.3 has explored the overall context of this study. A central aim of this research is to challenge the deficit viewpoint and provide opportunities for equity in education, concepts which have been outlined in sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2. Definitions of socio-economic disadvantage and educational disadvantage have been explored in section 2.3.3. Interventions and programmes that have been put in place in Ireland to address educational disadvantage and their effectiveness have been outlined in section 2.3.4. The chapter concludes with an exploration of educational disadvantage in relation to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory. Programmes promoting positive engagement and strengthening the mesosystem's elements, such as family literacy programmes are beneficial to tackling educational disadvantage and will be explored in section 2.4.

2.4 Family Literacy

Family literacy is an integral element of this doctoral research, which aims to explore the idea of parent-designed family literacy workshops to develop the proximal process of family literacy practice in the homes of families whose children attend this DEIS school. To introduce the concept of literacy, section 2.4.1 explores definitions and conceptualisations of literacy and literacy development, particularly emergent literacy development. Socio-economic status and literacy development are explored briefly in section 2.4.2, considering literacy levels in DEIS schools, as is the context of this research. Section 2.4.3 then defines the concept of family literacy, distinguishing between family literacy practices in the home and family literacy programmes. Definitions, research, benefits and barriers to both family literacy practices and programmes are outlined, as are recommendations for future practice. The section concludes with

a brief exploration of family literacy in relation to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory.

2.4.1 Definitions of Literacy

Academic research and international policies have influenced and shaped definitions of literacy over time (Cambridge Assessment, 2013; UNESCO, 2005). According to Keefe and Copeland (2011), how we define literacy influences the types of literacy experiences and opportunities available to learners. Gee (1991) describes the traditional view of literacy as the ability to read, write and use arithmetic. Similarly, Hanauer (2009) suggests that traditionally, literacy involves the reader aiming to decode a certain text and to understand this text for its one correct meaning. However, definitions of literacy are constantly evolving and no longer include just reading, writing, and listening. More recent definitions describe literacy as not being solely about a set of reading and writing skills but as "what people do with reading, writing, and texts in real-world contexts and why they do it" (Perry, 2012, p. 54). The idea that literacy is not solely about letters and words but includes communication (verbal and non-verbal) is also proposed by French (2013). In their document titled *Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3-8 years)*, Kennedy et al. (2012) suggest that definitions of literacy should include cognitive, sociocultural, creative, affective, cultural-historical, and aesthetic factors. The Department of Education and Skills states that "literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media" (2011, p.8). The fundamentals of literacy include phonological awareness, oral language, and vocabulary, as well as fluency, phonics, comprehension, phonemic awareness, fluency, motivation, and engagement (Carroll et al., 2011; Durham et al., 2007; Paratore et al., 2011).

Bleach (2013) outlines that early learning can be considered as "the foundation for all subsequent learning" (p. 254), stating the importance of high-quality interactions and a stimulating environment in the early years. This idea is echoed by Paratore et al. (2011), who outline that "early experiences pave the way for later success" (p. 109), encouraging us to place great importance on the early literacy experiences of children in the emergent literacy phase of

development. Literacy development begins at birth (Whitehead, 2007) and emerges steadily in the early years of a child's life (Epstein, 2007). The skills, knowledge, and attitudes developed in the emergent literacy phase are precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Emergent literacy is described as the phase where children develop alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, crucial pre-reading skills, word knowledge, print concepts and word production (Schmitt, Simpson & Friend, 2011). According to French (2013), the base for early literacy development is dependent on everyday communication and includes hearing and identifying sounds, repeating sounds and rhymes, as well as listening, looking at and talking about stories. A child's emergent communication and oral language skills in the early stages of development impact their literacy development in years to come (Epstein, 2007; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002).

Vygotsky (1962) argues the importance of a child's environment and early experiences on their language development, outlining that this stage is crucial for development. Similarly, Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) outline that "essential for early learning is a stimulating environment" (p.11). According to Raban and Coates (2004), children who experience a print-rich environment in the home in the emergent literacy phase make more progress in literacy learning when compared to their peers, who may miss out on these early language and literacy experiences. This research targets families of children in the emergent literacy phase of development and aims to promote opportunities for early literacy and language development and stimulating environments.

According to Perry (2012), sociocultural understandings of literacy consider how people use literacy differently depending on their context. Literacy is now seen by many to be socially situated and shaped by a person's social, cultural, and environmental factors. Complex and socially diverse situations and factors influence literacy, including culture, socio-economic status, religion, history, and language (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010). According to UNESCO (2005), literacy is not uniform but is shaped by social and educational institutions. Barton and Hamilton (1998) argue that various literacy types dominate in different contexts and social situations. Literacy varies in accordance with the social context in which it is being practised and used, and in turn, needs to be reinterpreted in each new setting (Hamilton, Barton & Ivanic, 2000). Certain

literacy practices are more dominant, influential, and visible than others in varying social situations, according to Barton and Hamilton (1998), and a person's particular literacy practices influence the type of experience they have in that situation. Taylor (1997) argues that some literacies are valued and are more dominant, while others are devalued. NALA (2010) argue that literacies should not be homogenised, but rather varying language and literacy practices should be acknowledged, recognised, and celebrated. These ideas are at the forefront of this research and aims to acknowledge the literacy inequalities some families may face. Diversity exists across literacies, an essential factor to consider when planning literacy activities or pedagogy. The idea that literacy pedagogy is often "formalised, monocultural and monolingual" is discussed by Cazden et al. (1996, p. 61), who indicate that one type of literacy cannot suit all learners from all socio-economic status or backgrounds, as will be discussed in the following section.

2.4.2 Socio-economic Status and Literacy

"Without literacy skills, there is little hope of social inclusion for marginalised families".

(Home School Community Liaison National Team, 2009, p. 7)

Literacy and its benefits are unevenly distributed across social groups, causing literacy inequalities in our society (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010). The idea that not all children and adults may have had the opportunity to achieve their full literacy potential is outlined by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2013), stating that repeated generational cycles of literacy inequalities exist due to social and economic reasons. Taylor (1997) encourages us to view literacy as a human right, whereby those who lack literacy skills are also at a loss in terms of social justice, highlighting the importance of ensuring that all members of our society have access to opportunities for literacy development. The equality perspective on literacy, as outlined by Baker, Lynch and Cantillon (2004), argues that unmet literacy needs can be linked to intergenerational educational inequalities. Literacy inequalities are detrimental to families, communities and to the individual themselves.

Cregan (2008) outlines that certain language and literacy codes have more power in educational settings and are more suitable to school, with children who possess alternative codes having to adjust their code to meet the needs of the school, rather than the other way around, in turn devaluing their code and setting them up for a disadvantage from the very start. MacRuaric (1997) echoes this idea, stating that the language used in school can alienate children and that respect for all children's language and literacy practices is vital. Taylor (1997) encourages us to highlight the importance of recognising diversity in language and literacy and incorporating families' cultural and language resources into literacy activities in formal schooling.

According to the *Report on Education Inequality and Disadvantage and Barriers to Education*, children in DEIS schools are underperforming in the areas of literacy and numeracy in comparison to children who attend non-DEIS schools (House of the Oireachtas, 2019) (see chapter 1). Although there are improvements in literacy and numeracy levels in DEIS schools, the DEIS programme is insufficient for challenging educational disadvantage and is not succeeding in empowering children who experience educational disadvantage. Eivers et al. (2005) suggest that the gap in literacy achievement in children from various SES backgrounds in Ireland may be due to the idea that not all parents may be best equipped to support their children's language and literacy development for various reasons. According to Jensen (2013), children from low-SES backgrounds can face issues with their literacy skills and vocabulary development, often due to a lack of parental interest. This deficit viewpoint is counteracted by Cregan (2008) and the CSO (2014), who suggest that the vast majority of parents are interested in and supportive of their child's learning but are sometimes unclear on how best to support it. Bleach (2013) also concludes that parents have high aspirations for their children but may not recognise their pivotal in their child's development and learning.

VanBergen et al. (2016) explore an idea known as the familial effect, which focuses on the idea that genetic and environmental factors combined influence a child's learning. Studies on the linguistic and cognitive abilities of children in their early years of development have shown that genetic ability is one factor to be considered in the development of linguistic and cognitive skills; however, it is primarily the child's context that influences this early development

(Buckingham et al., 2014; Paratore et al., 2011). Horowitz (2000) suggests the term 'swamping conditions' whereby social, cultural and economic conditions influence children's development on either end of the advantage scale. Various theories and models suggest that a child's early development is influenced by their home environment, which some argue is influenced by the socio-economic status in which a family exists. Rutter, Moffitt and Caspi (2006) explore the diathesis-stress model, which suggests that genetic influence may be more influential in the early development of children from disadvantaged or chaotic environments than children from more advantaged or secure backgrounds. According to Buckingham et al. (2014) and Taylor and Schatschneider (2010), children from higher SES backgrounds who may struggle in the education system due to cognitive ability often get support from their environment; however, children from lower SES backgrounds who struggle may not receive this educational support from their home environment and may be challenged by ability and environmental issues. As a result of this potential lack of support from their environment, the cognitive and academic development of children from low-SES backgrounds may be negatively affected or hindered. This line of thought can also be viewed as deficit and is critiqued and challenged throughout this research.

The idea that it is not a child's SES that determines their literacy outcomes but the values, activities and practices carried out in the home and school is suggested by Sylva et al. (2004). The influence of parental involvement in education can combat perceived educational disadvantage. According to the National Institute of Adult Community Education (NIACE) (2013a), parental involvement is more than four times more important than SES in influencing academic success (see section 2.5). Great importance lies in promoting good family literacy programmes and intensive early interventions to ensure a positive impact on families and to arrest educational disadvantage (Goodhall & Vorhaus, 2011). This belief is critical to this doctoral research, which aims to support and develop positive values and practices in the areas of family literacy and parental engagement in education from an early age.

2.4.3 Family Literacy- Practices and Programmes

The term 'family literacy' was first used by Taylor (1983), to describe the reading and writing practices in the homes of the families she worked with that supported literacy development. From this, definitions of family literacy have been dynamic and developed over time, placing value on the family and the home as essential for acquiring literacy assets. Definitions of family literacy vary across sectors, with NALA (2020) describing it as a "multi-faceted approach to learning that brings substantial benefits to families, schools and communities" (NALA, 2020, p. 114) of all SES backgrounds. The definition of family literacy that is to the forefront of this research is one outlined by NALA (2011a), which states that family literacy is the use and development of literacy in families and communities (especially activities that involve two or more generations), and the educational programmes that support and develop literacy in the family context. For clarity, this section will look at these two elements separately: firstly, the family literacy practices that families engage in in the home and in the local community and secondly, the family literacy programmes that are offered to support and help families (which will be outlined in sections 2.4.3.2 and 2.4.3.3 respectively). Policy in relation to literacy development and family literacy, in particular, will be outlined in the next section, section 2.4.3.1.

2.4.3.1 The Policy Context

Irish and international policy in education, equality, social inclusion, and literacy recognises the importance of family literacy both directly and indirectly. In terms of Irish children's primary school education, the *Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines that parents are a child's primary educator and recognises the influence of the home on development and learning in relation to all aspects, including literacy (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999). The new *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2023) outlines the importance of parental involvement and positive partnerships between the home and school to ensure optimal learning for the child, including in the area of literacy development. Similarly, the *Aistear* framework (NCCA, 2009) and the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA, 2019) place importance on parent involvement, with the latter placing a focus on parental and family engagement in literacy development,

encouraging parents to see the value of their role in their child's language and literacy development. NALA (2010) suggest that to enhance the effectiveness of family literacy programmes, they should be linked to both the primary school curriculum and the Aistear framework.

DEIS policy highlights the importance of “harnessing education to break down barriers and stem the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage by equipping learners to participate, succeed and contribute to society” (DES, 2017, p. 6). Family literacy can play an essential role in achieving the above goal and places importance on the relationship between the family and the school to promote collaboration and increase engagement in education and literacy development. Literacy development is an important element of the DEIS plans published by the Department of Education in 2005 and 2017, with clear goals and visions for the literacy development of our young people attending DEIS schools. Parental engagement and community links are named as effective ways to tackle this, both of which are incorporated into family literacy programmes and in this research.

In 2010, NALA argued that policy both in Ireland and internationally should be clearer on the importance of family literacy and should focus on the development of family literacy to a greater extent as “a basis for improving chances of educational equality for both children and adults” (Hegarty and Feeley, 2010, p.6). In recent years, policy has begun to explicitly recognise the importance of family literacy. The *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People (2011-2020)* (DES, 2011) outlines a commitment to enabling parents to support their children’s literacy development and outlines the importance of home-school relationships and parental engagement to mitigate the effects of educational disadvantage. It highlights the need to address the concerns around the literacy learning of children from low-SES backgrounds in Ireland and aims to recognise the importance of family literacy activities to support this learning. It stresses that literacy includes much more than reading and writing skills and that society is at a loss if the people of Ireland fail to have basic literacy skills, leading to early school dropout, unemployment and poor mental health.

Inter-agency collaboration is prioritised in the *Better Outcomes Brighter Future: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People*

(Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2014), which prioritises helping parents to best support their children and promotes the importance of early intervention for children's learning and development outcomes. It is family-orientated and is guided by the principles of children's rights and equality. It stresses that "parents are the foundation for good child outcomes and have significant influence, particularly in the early years of children's lives" (p.7) and sees a commitment to supporting parents as one of the most effective supports that the state can offer.

International policies relating to family literacy include the *EU Social Pillar of Rights* and the *United National Sustainable Development Goals*, both of which have underpinning principles of equality and social inclusion. The *EU Social Pillar of Rights* outlines that an investment in family makes moral, social and economic sense and aims to ensure that children who face disadvantage are given opportunities for equality, reflecting the underpinning values of family literacy. It aims to break the existing intergenerational cycles of disadvantage by investing in children and families and encouraging an integrated approach to do so (European Commission, 2021). The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal number 4 stresses that all countries should "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all" (UN, 2015). Family learning is critical to achieving this goal and allows inclusive and equal education opportunities for people of all ages. Although not always explicitly named in policy documents, the underpinning values and aims of family literacy are evident in Irish and international policy in education, literacy, equality and social inclusion.

2.4.3.2 Family Literacy Practices

The first understanding of family literacy is that it is the literacy practices and activities that children, parents and families engage in in the home. Family literacy is "learning that begins with the lived reality of parents and carers" and supports learning in the home (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010, p. 12). When parents themselves were asked by NALA what they understood by the term family literacy, they described that it was language and literacy activities that happen outside of school within the broader work of the family, with skill, care and

resource implications (NALA, 2011b). This rich literacy and language expresses the culture and history of families and communities (NALA, 2011a). Family literacy practice should be viewed as a social practice in order to recognise that some literacy practices associated with different SES can carry more weight and power than others. This can lead to children and adults from low-SES backgrounds and areas of educational disadvantage not fitting into the dominant literacies that are used in education (NALA, 2010), as outlined in section 2.4.2.

Family literacy happens across different models and across a range of settings (McCoy, Quail & Smyth, 2010) including in the home, the car, and the local environment, to name a few. It happens at various times (including bedtime, homework time, and dinner time) using various resources (such as books, toys and games) and can be diverse in each household based on the needs and interests of the family. Family literacy practices and resources in the home can encompass a wide range of varying activities around reading, oral language, phonological awareness, vocabulary and writing. Read aloud or story time is a family literacy activity outlined by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) (2020) in their document for parents titled *Potential Learning Experiences to Support Language Learning*. Burgess et al. (2002) outline that there are numerous benefits to parents and children taking part in shared reading experiences. Benefits include encouraging a love for books, encouraging fluency in reading, developing listening skills and building relationships between the parent and the child (PDST, 2020). Other activities which can be done in the home include child-led play (whereby the child develops listening skills, motivation and playful language), listening games such as I Spy (to develop engagement and listening), baking (to develop vocabulary, sequencing and comprehension), nature walks (which allow children an increased appreciation of the world around them, while also developing vocabulary) and free writing (to encourage ownership and foster positive attitudes to learning) (PDST, 2020). As noted previously, the term family literacy is the one used in the case of this research as the primary focus is on literacy, both formal and informal, but often, the term family learning is also appropriate to describe the varying activities done in the home. The terms family literacy and family learning are often used interchangeably in research in these areas.

2.4.3.2.1 Research

NALA has produced and continues to produce an extensive body of research on family literacy in Ireland and has invested in the publishing of numerous reports and the funding of various initiatives on family literacy as they recognise that "literacy is a broader concept than the needs and demands of school" (NALA, 2011b, p2). In 2010, NALA produced a report titled *"At home with family literacy: A study of family practices"*, whereby they carried out qualitative research in four areas of disadvantage, focussing on the daily literacy practices that the families in these areas reported that they engaged in. This research highlighted the need to develop programmes and initiatives that recognise the competencies and capabilities of families and prioritise a wealth-based approach to literacy. They furthermore outlined the importance of creating strong home, school and community partnerships for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Another research report commissioned by NALA titled *Taking care of family literacy work: An enquiry with parents about their experience of nurturing language and literacy in the home* (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010) showed the wide range of family literacy practices being carried out in the homes of the parents who participated and stressed the value that these parents placed on the language and literacy development of their children in terms of their children's learning and well-being. This research put forward the idea that some parents did not feel confident supporting their children's language and literacy development, particularly when their children began to get older and moved up through the school system. The importance of investing in the early years was identified by parents, whereby home-based literacy practices in these years were prioritised. This research also focused on home-school relationships and reported the positive influence of strong home-school relationships and collaboration on family literacy and named the HSCL as a critical player in building positive relationships between the home and school.

The *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI) study, a joint project of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Central Statistics Office, is a national, longitudinal study of children and young people which provides data for the Irish Government to aid policy decisions. The study has delved into various elements of children's and young people's lives and experiences, including those in relation to literacy and language development in

the home. Researchers working on the *Growing Up in Ireland* study published a report titled *Influences on 9-year olds' learning: Home, school and community*, which highlights that “children’s learning occurs across a range of settings” (McCoy, Quail, & Smyth, 2010, p. 10). Reading in the home was explored, whereby 47% of children reported reading with their parents once a week. Children who reported this also reported that they enjoyed reading for pleasure more than those who did not read with their parents once a week. Further GUI studies, which looked at infant development, highlighted the importance of reading and talking to infants for language, literacy and cognitive development (Murray & Egan, 2014).

Another mixed-method longitudinal study currently being carried out in Ireland is the *Children School Lives (CSL)* project. This study looks at primary education in Ireland and aims to capture rich information on how primary education is experienced by pupils, teachers, principals and parents. The CSL project looked into the experiences of children in junior infants in relation to family literacy and found that 52% of parents reported that they or another adult in the home reads to their child daily, with 4% outlining that their child never or occasionally gets read to in the home (Sloan, et al., 2021). When asked about the number of books in the home, over two-thirds of parents explained that they had over thirty children's books at home, with 8% stating that they had between one and ten children's books in the home. Research such as that done by NALA, GUI and CSL looks at family literacy in Ireland and paves the way for future research in the area, including this doctoral research. This doctoral research considered the home and family literacy practices of the families who engage in the research and aimed to build a tailored family literacy programme for the families who attend this DEIS school.

2.4.3.2.2 Benefits of Family Literacy Programmes

Brooks et al. (2008) state that for children to achieve improved educational and literacy outcomes, appropriate language modelling, opportunities to engage in activities, recognition of achievement and a climate of encouragement must be provided in the home, all of which family literacy practices can offer. Family literacy practices in the home encourage formal and informal learning among the

family (NALA, 2010). Early opportunities in the home for literacy development are optimal. According to Taylor (1997), family literacy practices improve confidence in children and adults and promote positive attitudes to literacy development. Family literacy practices in the home offer social and emotional benefits for parents, children and the family as a whole. Family literacy time allows families to build relationships and promote well-being within the family unit (Lamb, Fairfax-Cholmeley and Evans, 2009).

2.4.3.2.3 Barriers to Family Literacy Practices

Parents and families can face various challenges and barriers which may inhibit their ability to engage in and promote family literacy practices in the home. Research commissioned by NALA (Hegarty and Feeley, 2010) interviewed parents and asked them about the challenges they faced in engaging in family literacy practices. In their report, Hegarty and Feeley (2010) outlined that time constraints often prevented them from engaging in meaningful family literacy experiences with their children, as they had other commitments such as work and children's younger siblings and found it challenging to manage their time to prioritise family literacy activities. Parents also outlined that they lacked confidence in supporting their school-aged children's language and literacy development at home, stating that it has been easier to support their children in preschool but that their confidence had decreased as their children got older and advanced through the education system. Technology was also named as a barrier to engagement, with parents stating they did not feel confident using technology to support their children.

2.4.3.3 Family Literacy Programmes

Family literacy also includes educational activities and programmes that adults and children engage in "to improve and support the literacy-learning environment for everyone" in the home (Devitt & Ross, 2022, p. 9). Schools, ETBs and family resource centres offer programs to engage families in structured family literacy initiatives. The main aims of these programmes are to develop skills, competencies and confidence in both children and adults, support parents to become more active players in their children's literacy and language development

and help parents understand the impact of the support they can provide for their children (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010; Taylor, 1997).

Family literacy can be described as “an effective means of engaging many marginalised families who may have had a negative experience of formal schooling, helping to reduce barriers to returning to education”, as well as a mechanism for improving parents own skills in order to break intergenerational cycles of educational disadvantage (NALA, 2011a, p.27). NALA (2010) argue that family literacy is widely renowned as vital for families who experience inequality through educational disadvantage. They acknowledge that family literacy programmes play an essential role in combating intergenerational cycles of educational disadvantage by overcoming barriers that may inhibit families from engaging in school learning. As is the case for family learning programmes, family literacy programmes aim to enable adults to acquire new skills and grow in confidence. These programmes provide opportunities for developing home-school relationships and can provide a safe place for parents to engage in learning activities and interact with each other (NALA, 2011a). Some literacy programmes and initiatives fail to acknowledge social and cultural elements of literacy practice (Hamilton & Barton, 2000); however, family literacy strives to address this issue and recognises that the local literacy and language that is used at home and in the community is woven into the daily lives of children and adults. Family literacy programmes can promote social and educational equality by building "literacy wealth" (NALA, 2010, p. 9).

2.4.3.3.1 Family Literacy in the Irish Context

Irish family literacy programmes have been developed from locally relevant research and suggest that working with families can make a substantial difference in children's later learning experiences and outcomes (NESF, 2009). Family literacy provision in Ireland has developed hugely since it was first rolled out three decades ago and is now seen as an integral learner-centred approach that can have a dynamic impact on social, educational and economic factors at play for families and communities (Carpentieri et al., 2011). Family literacy has been written about in Ireland since 1994, when the Clare Family Learning Project began to see the importance of promoting family literacy in Ireland. Following the

success of the work being done in Clare, other adult learning centres followed, leading to the publication of guidelines for family literacy in Ireland and the founding of numerous family literacy and family learning projects and initiatives across the country. The introduction of the DEIS scheme in 2005 paved the way for more structured family literacy opportunities to be available for families from low-SES areas and provided resources for family literacy programmes to be run in schools that were deemed to be disadvantaged. It recognised the vital role of the family and the home in children's learning experiences and prioritised this (DES, 2005).

As outlined, many family literacy initiatives are run across the country by varying institutes, and it is beyond the scope of this research to outline them all. Some family literacy initiatives worth mentioning include those run by the *Childhood Development Initiative* (CDI), namely *Doodle Den* and *Doodle Families*, both of which promote and prioritise family literacy opportunities for families in areas of disadvantage in Dublin. These successful programmes introduced a vast range of literacy activities and resulted in improved literacy scores and increased family library activity in an urban disadvantaged area of Dublin (Rafferty & Colgan, 2013). *YoungBallymun*, another highly successful initiative in Dublin, has run various programmes to encourage family literacy, including the *Hug Your Book* programme, which promotes the education of parents around book reading with their children. Other programmes which have been created to scaffold parents and children from low-SES families include the *Education Matters* programme run by Focus Ireland (Loftus, 2017), which found that by providing intensive literacy interventions and forming close liaisons with parents, children from low-SES backgrounds benefit greatly. Kent, Bleach and Fagan (2016) outline that the Parent Child Home Programme is another example of a successful programme run in Ireland and abroad to support parents in developing their children's language and literacy skills. This targeted programme is in line with Aistear and Síolta and facilitates home visits to families to encourage enjoyable interactions between parents and children. The programme also strives to promote parents as their child's first educator and has a positive impact on parents, children and families (Kent et al., 2016).

Family literacy programmes are offered nationwide in various settings such as schools, ETBS and family resource centres. A recommendation from

Taking care of family literacy work: An enquiry with parents about their experience of nurturing language and literacy in the home, a report published by NALA (2010), suggested that further research was needed to create a menu of family literacy programmes to match the diverse needs of families. In 2022, NALA commissioned a survey which presented the first broad overview of family literacy provision outside of the ETBs in Ireland. In this report, Devitt and Ross (2022) outlined the family literacy services provided by forty- four organisations across Ireland, thirteen of whom provided specific family literacy programmes, and the other thirty-five that provided needs specific literacy services such as form filling for families and parents. When asked about the family literacy resources they use for their services, one-third of participants reported that they have created their own resources, with four of the forty-eight outlining that they have created resources based on the needs of the parents and families they work with. This report outlined the diversity across the several services that provide family literacy supports in Ireland, with many focussing on children's literacy with parents of children in primary school as a way of engaging parents and families (who may have family literacy needs) in their services (Devitt & Ross, 2022). The need for more connectivity and visibility across the family literacy sector was highlighted by participants in this report as both a means of identifying family literacy supports and services which are available for learners and also as a way of developing professional networks between organisations that provide such services.

2.4.3.3.2 Benefits of Family Literacy Programmes

Family literacy programmes benefit the parent, child, family as a whole, school and broader society and are a "win-win solution for children, schools and adults" (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010, p. 5). The earlier the intervention, the better, as opportunities for engagement in programmes early in a child's schooling can allow for solid foundations in terms of the parent relationships with the school and optimal opportunities for child development (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010). Unlike other interventions, which may have short-term effects, family literacy programmes can have a positive impact for some time afterwards, and practices can be sustained by families themselves (NALA, 2016). Family literacy, first and

foremost, improves the literacy levels of participants of all ages within the family (NALA, 2010). It encourages formal and informal learning in the family and can work to break intergenerational cycles of literacy inequalities. According to Taylor (1997), the first to use the term family literacy, family literacy has numerous advantages, including supporting both children's and adult's language and literacy development and providing opportunities to discover more about how children and families learn. Parent reading scores improve, children's language and reading skills increase, and literacy-related home activities happen more often when families engage in family literacy (NALA, 2010).

Family literacy programmes widen participation in lifelong learning and encourage parents to engage in new learning activities while promoting integration into the community and society in general and increasing employment opportunities and well-being (NALA, 2020). Family learning often attracts first-time learners or encourages learners who may have had a negative experience with education in the past to re-engage with learning (Carpentieri et al., 2011). It offers opportunities to break down barriers between learning in different contexts and increases families' abilities to support learning in the contexts of the school, the home, and the community (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010). It acknowledges that not all learning happens in school and ensures that the learning in the home is not undervalued, unrecognised or under-resourced and provides opportunities for participatory learning (NALA, 2010).

The social and emotional benefits that family literacy opportunities and programmes offer children, parents and families are numerous, including allowing parents social opportunities to engage with other parents and adults and create social networks (Swain, Brooke & Bosley, 2014). Opportunities to engage in programmes can help break down the isolation parents feel (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010). In family literacy programmes, other learners often provide learning support, which can increase parental confidence and engagement in learning while also improving literacy needs (NALA, 2016). Taylor (1997) outlines that family literacy programmes work to improve the confidence and skills of both children and parents, as well as develop capacity in parents as the first educators of their children. Family learning activities offer opportunities for sharing and building on home cultures. Family literacy programmes can also have community

benefits whereby collaboration with local agencies and resources (for example, the local ETB or local library) are encouraged (NALA, 2020).

Home-school relationships can benefit substantially from family literacy programmes. These programmes can allow parents to gain more information on the importance of the impact of their involvement and engagement in their child's education and development (NALA, 2010) and can increase parent perspectives on the value of education (Swain et al., 2014). Family literacy programmes can foster positive communication between the home and the school and break down barriers that may exist between the two while raising recognition of the importance of family literacy with parents and staff (NALA, 2011a). Opportunities to form a greater understanding of the school system are offered to parents through family learning programmes (Swain et al., 2014). As outlined, the benefits of structured family literacy programmes are great for all players, including the child, parents, school and broader community and society. The HSCL can be a valuable resource for developing family literacy programmes in DEIS schools.

2.4.3.3.3 The HSCL and Family Literacy Programmes

“The Home School Community Liaison scheme is vital in supporting literacy in the home and the community”.

(Home School Community Liaison National Team, 2009, p. 7)

One crucial player in providing family literacy programmes and promoting family literacy practices is the HSCL, who plays a vital role in promoting family literacy development in DEIS schools. Hegarty and Feeley (2010) argue that the HSCL is a prime example of policy put into practice and plays an integral role in providing family literacy programmes for families and parents at risk of educational disadvantage. According to NALA (2020), "the HSCL in a DEIS school is a pivotal partner in developing family literacy" (p. 63). The HSCL aims to provide a range of initiatives catering to the complex and changing needs of families at risk of educational disadvantage and social exclusion. The scheme acknowledges that literacy skills are vital for all children and families to engage in the education

system and prioritises enabling parents to become active participants in their children's language and literacy learning.

Various initiatives that have been put in place across the country by HSCLs to encourage parental engagement with literacy in the home and the school are outlined in *Initiatives undertaken to support the development of literacy: The Home School Community Liaison scheme* (Home School Community Liaison National Team, 2009). Programmes to support parents and families sometimes begin before the child even enters school (O'Toole et al., 2019). HSCLs run workshops to focus on the transition to school (HSCL, Limerick City and County Coordinators, 2017) and the importance of supporting early language development to build foundations for later literacy. Workshops prioritise book reading, talking, listening, rhymes and games in the home. As children progress through the school system, other workshops and supports are offered, including storybook reading sessions in the classroom, which aim to place the parent in the role of the teacher, foster a love of books and aid language, emotional and social development. Other initiatives include language development programmes (in line with speech and language therapists), gifting literacy materials to the home, paired reading initiatives, book blitz schemes, shared story sacks and organised library visits (Home School Community Liaison National Team, 2009). Despite the challenges that HSCLs may face in engaging parents (parent apprehension, lack of parent confidence, lack of literacy skills, parent availability and teacher apprehension, to name a few), when programmes such as the ones mentioned above are run in school communities, the benefits are optimal for all. The HSCL can work with parents/ families to implement enablers to combat barriers that may inhibit families from engaging in family literacy programmes, some of which are outlined in the next section.

2.4.3.3.4 Barriers to Engagement in Family Literacy Programmes

For various reasons, families and parents may not always be able to engage in structured family literacy programmes and initiatives. Parents who took part in research conducted by NALA (2010) outlined that they struggled with their relationship with their child's school and that some cultural differences existed between them and the school, including differences in class, ethnicity, and

language, factors which discouraged them from engaging in school-led initiatives. Parents stated that they felt undervalued and sometimes disrespected by their child's school. Interestingly, NALA (2010) noted that parents who participated in this research whose children attended a DEIS school with a HSCL expressed that they had a good relationship with the school and the HSCL, whereby there was an atmosphere of openness and inclusion, and equal home-school relationships existed.

Bad prior experiences with education can deter some parents, which can hinder parents from engaging or re-engaging with education and family literacy activities (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010). As outlined by Heckman and Masterov (2004), the idea that parents from disadvantaged areas (whom family literacy programmes usually cater for) care less about their children's language and literacy development is untrue; however, these parents are at risk of facing barriers to supporting their children's development due to having poor prior experiences and lesser access to financial, material, cultural, temporal and corporal resources. Other issues that parents encounter, such as transportation issues, childcare provision and lack of time, can hinder their engagement in family literacy programmes (NALA, 2020). Administration issues can act as a barrier to engagement in family literacy programmes. Issues such as garda vetting, funding provision and finding suitable tutors to run family literacy programmes can hinder the successful provision of family literacy opportunities (NALA, 2020).

Engagement of male figures in family education programmes can be a challenge. The recruitment of men (usually fathers) can be complex and challenging but is important for a child's socio-emotional and literacy development (Morgan, Nutbrown & Hannon, 2009). Men are often underrepresented in family literacy programmes, according to NIACE (2013a), with a predominance of mothers attending courses. Parents, particularly those from low-SES backgrounds, face varying challenges and barriers that can deter them from engaging meaningfully in family literacy opportunities.

2.4.3.3.5 Family Literacy Programmes to Address Socio-economic Differences in Literacy

As outlined earlier, family literacy programmes are most commonly run in areas of socio-economic and educational disadvantage where substantial literacy inequalities exist amongst both adults and children (CSO, 2013). Baker et al. (2004) state that these multifaceted inequalities include poverty and social and cultural exclusion. Family literacy interventions address this inequality and disadvantage by ensuring that more children live in homes with books and that more parents acquire skills that scaffold them to support their child's learning and development. Although improved literacy levels do not change structural inequalities, they allow for increased well-being, employment opportunities and social inclusion. When family literacy programmes are offered alongside intensive early intervention, results are optimal for families at risk of educational disadvantage (Goodhall & Vorhaus, 2011).

Family literacy addresses unmet intergenerational literacy inequalities by providing opportunities for literacy development for people of all ages. It provides an opportunity for learners at risk of educational disadvantage to positively impact their children's learning and development through engagement. Research by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (2008) in the UK found evidence that the intergenerational transfer of educational disadvantage can be reversed through family literacy programmes, a huge incentive to invest in these programmes.

According to NALA (2010), some family literacy programmes highlight the deficit viewpoint that families from low-SES backgrounds have a lack of literacy skills and need interventions rather than "clarifying and illustrating family literacy competencies" (p.24). It is vital to understand, acknowledge and recognise the needs and strengths of a community before making assumptions and implementing programmes or initiatives based on perceived needs, an idea at the forefront of this research. According to Eldering and Vedder (1999), there is no 'off the shelf' model for family literacy programmes, and such programmes should be designed with a specific focus to meet the needs of the particular group who are attending them, replicating the same programme over and over for various groups does not provide optimal results. A focus on acknowledging the assets, resources and competencies of families and communities leads us towards

wealth-based thinking and away from the deficit viewpoint, ensuring that these families are not marginalised or excluded from the expectations of schools or society (NALA, 2011a). Family literacy approaches should begin by enabling and supporting parents to be the "best learning guide possible for their children" (NALA, 2020, p. 14). Understanding that all families have valuable literacy resources is integral to this research and is a characteristic of an effective family literacy programme.

2.4.3.3.6 Characteristics of Effective Family Literacy Programmes

Numerous reports on family literacy practices and programmes in Ireland have been published, in particular by NALA, outlining recommendations that could be put in place to improve family literacy in Ireland. Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) outline that effective family literacy programmes have commonalities, which include- culturally appropriate support, meaningful home-school relationships, appropriate learning opportunities for parents, and welcoming interventions; when combined, these elements allow for effective and meaningful practice.

Recommendations such as increasing involvement in schools, promoting partnerships with schools, including content from the primary curriculum and the Aistear framework in programme content, and increasing library services into family literacy programmes are outlined by NALA in various reports (NALA, 2010; Hegarty & Feeley, 2010). A recommendation from Hegarty and Feeley (2010) of particular relevance to this research is to ensure the inclusion of parents in the planning of family literacy programmes.

In a more recent report on family literacy, NALA (2020) provide us with four different categories of solutions to improve family literacy practice in Ireland, including resource (such as a welcoming environment, books in the home and a range of family learning opportunities), cultural (including developing secure partnerships with families of all cultures and providing opportunities for interculturalism), relational (promoting the formation of good relationships and recognising the parent's role in learning), and systemic solutions (ensuring family literacy is resourced adequately). Considering these solutions, NALA (2020) outlines guidelines for the practice, organisation, and outcomes of family literacy, which is rooted in data collected from several relevant stakeholders, including

parents, family literacy staff, HSCLs and others. Firstly, NALA suggests that family literacy programmes should ensure a learner-centred focus that values the parent's role and promotes a collaborative partnership by creating a comfortable learning environment. The importance of learning relationships is outlined, stating that collaborative partnerships should be prioritised to develop and sustain successful family literacy practices. Organisers and learners should be involved in all levels of design, delivery and promotion of the programmes to address learners' greatest needs and to allow learners to "actively create knowledge rather than passively absorbing knowledge created by others" (NALA, 2020, p. 109). A range of accessible and relevant courses should be offered for learners, all of which should benefit parents and children. This research considers these guidelines in the design of the tailored family literacy programme. This idea will be further explored in section 4.2.2.

2.4.4 Bronfenbrenner and Family Literacy

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model can be used to consider how children's development is influenced by their daily interactions. Looking at literacy development from an ecological perspective, the family should be considered alongside the child as the main focus for intervention rather than the child in isolation, as outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1974), "without family involvement, intervention is likely to be unsuccessful" (p. 300). Bronfenbrenner acknowledges the importance of a child's macrosystem when analysing literacy development. He explains that patterns of belief regarding literacy are inherited from generations through socialisation (1989); this is of particular interest when reviewing literacy practices and development in children at risk of educational disadvantage, as is the case for this research. Promoting family literacy practices and programmes, in particular programmes which are run in the school and broader community, promotes the importance of ensuring that the various players in a child's environment (in particular those in their mesosystem) work together to promote equality and literacy development and to develop 'person' characteristics such as confidence amongst participants. Family literacy programmes such as the one designed for this research promote the transfer of literacy skills across a range of environments or elements of the individual's context, including the home

and the school, therefore creating some consistency in the mesosystem for the child and their parents. Programmes such as this also promote bidirectional interactions and the development of relationships within the family unit to aid language and literacy development.

Section 2.5 has explored literacy, in particular family literacy. Definitions and an in-depth look into family literacy practices and programmes have been explored. Educational disadvantage, socio-economic status and context have been discussed. The benefits and barriers to family literacy practices and programmes have been outlined, as have recommendations for future practice in this area. The Irish context has been prioritised while considering international research and policy. The theoretical framework for this research, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, has been considered briefly in relation to literacy development and family literacy.

2.5 Home-School Relationships

“The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the family”.

(Bunreacht na hEireann, 2009, Article 41.1)

Parents are the most important people in children's lives (in the early years in particular) and provide children with their first learning opportunities (NCCA, 2009). According to Epstein and Sanders (2002), children's development and achievement in school are highly influenced by both the home and the school learning environments. For a child's development to be optimal, both the home and the school should strive to collaborate to support and scaffold the child's development through collaboration. Epstein and Sanders (2002) suggest that many important elements influence home, school, and community partnerships. This line of thought supports Bronfenbrenner's (1995, 2006) theory, whereby he argues that the child benefits are most favourable when all elements of the mesosystem (home, school, and community) work together. The stronger the links between the elements of the microsystem that make up the mesosystem, the easier it is for children to negotiate between them (O'Toole, 2016). The

development of these links is a vital aim of the HSCL scheme and this doctoral research.

As outlined in previous sections of this literature review, development is embedded across many varying contexts for a child, two of those being the home and the school, the elements of the mesosystem. The importance of collaboration between the home and the school will be discussed in this section, whereby parental involvement and engagement (section 2.5.1), partnerships (section 2.5.2), SES (section 2.5.3) and Bronfenbrenner's theory (section 2.5.4) will be explored.

2.5.1 Parental Involvement and Engagement in Education

“It is widely recognised that if pupils are to maximise their potential from schooling, they will need the full support of their parents”.

(Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003 p. 7)

Children's development is optimal when parental involvement and engagement in education are prioritised (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Parental involvement and engagement have immediate and long-lasting effects on children's social and emotional development, academic achievement and behaviour and overall enjoyment of school (O'Toole et al., 2019). Varying and conflicting definitions are used for parental involvement, parental engagement and partnerships between home and school (all relevant to this research), which can lead to confusion around the terminology. Both parental involvement and engagement and definitions of both will be discussed in this section.

In their report titled *Parents and Families*, Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education in Ireland, provide us with a definition of parental involvement as “the participation of parents in the development and education of their children from birth onwards, in recognition of the fact that they are the primary influence in their children's lives” (2002, p. 3). Hill et al. (2004) describe parental involvement as parent interactions with the school to promote their children's academic success.

Epstein and Sanders (2002) propose a model that includes six types of parental involvement. The first element involves supporting the parents through

promoting effective parenting skills while also familiarising the school with the backgrounds and cultures of the families. Communication, the second element, is crucial, and establishing effective two-way communication between home and school is prioritised. Thirdly, involving families in school activities through volunteering and training activities is encouraged. Epstein and Sanders' (2002) fourth element, learning at home, promotes involving families in the academic development of their children at home, including completing homework and working on goal setting. Decision-making, the fifth element, focuses on including families in school governance and organisations. Finally, promoting school collaboration with the community is encouraged, whereby resources and services available to the pupils and their families should collaborate with the school. Each of these elements plays a role in developing the relationship between home, school, and community. In order for this relationship to be effective, all three must feel a sense of warmth, trust, communication and satisfaction from the relationship (Nzinga-Johnson, Baker & Aupperlee, 2009)

Parental involvement and its effect on the achievement of children (aged 13/14) is explored by Singh, Bickley & Keith (1995). They outline four elements of parental involvement- parent-child communication about school-related matters, parental participation, support for school-related activities, parental aspirations for children's education and home structure (including discipline and encouragement to complete schoolwork in the home). Singh et al. (1995) found that when it came to pupil achievement, parental aspiration was the most influencing factor when considering social class. Zellman and Waterman (1998) provide a contradictory outlook on parental involvement in school and state that from their analysis of a study involving 193 families in Los Angeles, parental involvement in school activities did, in some cases, benefit parents and build stronger links between the home and school however these benefits did not appear to contribute to improved child outcomes. They concluded that parenting style seemed to be a more accurate predictor of children's academic achievement than the level of parental involvement.

Kocayoruk (2016) provides a range of suggestions for improving parental school involvement. He suggests that schools can support and facilitate increased family and parental involvement in education. Following this, schools should ensure that parents feel welcome and that open lines of communication

ensure common understandings and goals. Finally, he outlines that parents and families are responsible for supporting schools and playing a part in their children's schooling by involving themselves when opportunities arise. Kocayoruk (2016) states the importance of scaffolding these relationships and outlines that this should begin early (age 4-6) and continue to the completion of the child's schooling. He argues that the stronger this relationship is, the more opportunities there are for challenging barriers including educational disadvantage. Creating and scaffolding this relationship early in a child's schooling is a key focus of this doctoral research and will be discussed in section 2.5.2.

Parental engagement can be described as more than involvement, whereby the parent possesses a feeling of ownership, as outlined by Goodall and Montgomery (2014). It is a more dynamic and complex process (O'Toole et al., 2019). Goodall and Montgomery (2014) suggest that their involvement vs. engagement continuum illustrates the progression in this complex relationship between schools, pupils, and families. They argue that the idea of parental engagement in school focuses on a shift in agency and responsibility to the parents and family from the teachers and the school. For this process to be successful, positive relationships must exist between the home, school, and community. The parents must identify as and be treated as shared educators in their children's learning, an essential aim of this research.

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) identify three points on the continuum of parental involvement to parental engagement. The first point, parental involvement with the school, consists of the parents being involved in school-regulated activities. The school is in control, and the agency lies with them. These activities usually occur in the school, including an open evening or parent-teacher meetings. This point is often seen as a foundation to build relationships and is helpful for the transfer of knowledge; however, the benefits are limited.

The second point on the continuum, parental involvement with schooling, involves a more shared sense of agency and trust between the school and the parents. There is a slight shift in responsibility, and the relationship becomes more equal. The parents are now seen as contributors to learning and work in conjunction with the school. This point on the continuum allows for the breaking down of barriers between home environments and school environments. Parent-teacher meetings are also an example of this point on the continuum; however,

the transfer of information does not just come from the school; the parent also shares their thoughts and opinions on their child's education and development. Parents are now seen as "partners in the construction of a fuller portrait of the student and acknowledged contributors to the student's academic future" (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, p. 404). There is an opportunity for authentic dialogue and genuine engagement.

Parental engagement with children's learning is the third point of the continuum. At this stage, the choices lie with the parents, and they are engaged because they see the importance of education. They prioritise their child's learning because they see it as an important aspect of their role as a parent (Peters, Seeds & Goldstein, 2007). Activities on this point of the continuum may take place in school but are most likely to take place at home or outside of the school. Activities include extra-curricular undertakings and learning opportunities the parents provide in the home. For this to take place, the attitude of the parent is vital. Benefits include but are not limited to increased child achievement, motivation, and aspirations (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Research presented in this section outlines the importance of parental involvement and engagement. This doctoral research aims to move beyond parental involvement and engagement and strives to create partnerships in education, an idea outlined in the next section.

2.5.2 Home-School Partnerships

As outlined in the previous section, parental involvement and engagement are critical in education; however, a move towards partnership between the home and the school is encouraged as it allows for more genuine relationships to be formed and more genuine engagement to occur. Moves towards the recognition of parent agency and the respect for parent contributions in education have occurred in recent years in Ireland and abroad. Partnerships in education are not a new concept, with Bastani (1993) outlining that partnerships should involve a sharing of power between parent and school, genuine dialogue between both, a shared commitment and shared goals for children. In the Aistear framework document, the NCCA (2009) define the home-school partnership, stating, "partnership involves parents, families and practitioners working together to

benefit children. Each recognises, respects and values what the other does and says. Partnership involves responsibility on both sides" (p.9).

Research states that quality reciprocal relationships and partnerships between a child's home and school are essential to child development (Kocayoruk, 2016). This partnership can improve academic, social and personal development and can assist in building children's self-esteem and positive attitudes towards education (Wanat, 1997). The new *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2023) highlights the role that families play in a child's development and learning, stating that "they (parents) are the child's primary educators, and the curriculum promotes a partnership approach with parents to support their child's holistic development" (p.34). This curriculum document outlines that positive relationships and partnerships between the school and home are vital for pupil development and allow for consolidation and extension of the learning that happens in school.

According to the NCCA (2009), education partnerships benefit parents, teachers and children. Parent benefits include feeling valued and respected in terms of understanding their values and practices. They are more involved in their child's learning and understand the importance of education while gaining increased confidence to support it (Swain et al., 2009). Parents feel comfortable in the school setting. Benefits for children include experiencing more connections between two of their most important settings, the home and the school. Their confidence can increase, and they can feel more secure in their surroundings. Finally, teachers benefit from forming partnerships with parents as they benefit from parent expertise and knowledge and have an opportunity to understand families at a higher level (NCCA, 2009).

The importance of respecting and valuing parent's strengths and interests is outlined by NALA (2020), it is not enough to mould parents into the school agenda (O'Toole et al., 2019). This line of thinking allows for stronger parent-school partnerships and encourages genuine engagement and collaboration between the two. If not managed correctly, perceived 'partnerships' can reinforce pre-existing power issues and deficits (Gilleece, 2015). Hegarty and Feeley (2010) outline that a parent's ability to build strong partnerships with their child's school and to support their child's education is based on their own experience of schooling, their culture, their educational capital, and their capacity to support.

They argue that parents and families are expected to fit into the school culture and conform to the school's thinking rather than the school shifting power and adapting to their needs. Due to inequalities of condition, there can be discrepancies between the culture, resources, values and behaviour of children and families from varying backgrounds, some of which are valued more in our education system (see section 2.3). This research aims to address this issue and strives to ensure that all parents and families are encouraged to form strong relationships between the home and the school and are included equally and valued equally in our education system by focusing on the strengths that parents have.

The INTO (1997) argues that partnerships are integral to professional practice for effective primary schools in Ireland. It is the school's responsibility to ensure that the 'context' of home-school relationships (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) is prioritised due to the potential of parents feeling intimidated or lacking in confidence to get involved (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). According to O'Toole et al. (2019), schools must strive daily to ensure that all children, families and parents from varying backgrounds and languages, SES and minority groupings are supported in strengthening this process. They argue that pre-existing difficulties and barriers, including negative past experiences, differences in cultural or linguistic capital, or lack of confidence, must be constantly considered by schools, and efforts to support relationship-building and open communication should be prioritised. Gender can also act as a barrier to developing partnerships. According to Hornby and Lafaele (2011), fathers tend to be less involved with their child's school. O'Toole et al. (2019) state factors such as employment (with CSO figures in 2011 showing a higher employment rate in men) and exclusion can act as barriers for fathers, highlighting the importance of clear messages to both parents. Hart (2011) outlines that some living situations (whereby some fathers may live away from their children) can act as a barrier for fathers, as can the lack of informal contact that some fathers have with their child's school at the gate in the mornings. Hart (2011) also suggests that most school staff are female and, therefore, dominate the sector and that this may be a factor for less male engagement.

Linguistic and language barriers can also be a deterring factor for parents when it comes to developing home-school relationships. Parents who speak

English as an Additional Language (EAL) can find engaging with their children's school challenging due to language barriers and a lack of information on the Irish school system (O'Toole, 2016). Schools should aim to ensure that they engage with all parent's cultural and linguistic practices to ensure that their identity is prioritised and that they are supported in scaffolding their children's learning (O'Toole et al., 2019). According to Harris and Robinson (2016), schools often fail to do so, leading to a lack of parental involvement and engagement from EAL parents. Contextual supports such as International Days and the provision of English classes in schools are noted by O'Toole et al. (2019) as effective efforts to engage parents and to build relationships between the home and the school, provided they are more than 'lip service'. As outlined above, rather than encouraging parents to integrate into the dominant Irish culture, school staff should prioritise promoting all children and families' cultural and linguistic practices (O'Toole et al., 2019).

As outlined in section 2.3, the HSCL's role in DEIS schools is to prioritise those who may be marginalised and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage and to strengthen these home-school relationships; however, the responsibility is on all school staff and management in all school settings. According to O'Toole (2016), proactive, successful schools work continuously to promote positive relationships with families, particularly with those in greatest need, by prioritising positive interactions and opportunities for engagement and recognising the strengths of the parent and family community. Dauber and Epstein (1993) outline that teacher and school proactivity is proven to be more influential on parent involvement and engagement than family SES, highlighting the importance of Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2006) 'process' over 'person' and 'context' (O'Toole et al., 2019). The HSCL is a member of school staff who prioritises this proactivity and strives to ensure partnerships are formed between the home and school, an idea outlined in the next section.

2.5.2.1 The Role of the HSCL in Home-School Partnerships

In terms of home-school relationships and partnerships, HSCLs act as the point of intersection between the school, the home and the community, ensuring that a meaningful connection exists between all three (Conaty, 2002) and work to

mitigate potential risk factors for parents and families in relation to well-being and development (Smyth et al., 2015). According to Mulkerrins (2007), the importance of this point of intersection is seen by parents, who acknowledge that the HSCL plays a pivotal bridging role between the school, the family and community agencies, often making the school a more open and welcoming place for families and parents, improving parent-school communications, and developing a sense of community in the school. Research conducted by Weir et al. (2018) outlines that the HSCL can positively impact parent interest and awareness levels in relation to their child's education and that parents feel less threatened by the school system when good relationships are formed with the HSCL. Research shows that parents who are at risk of disadvantage, who have children who attend DEIS schools with a HSCL, feel more comfortable and welcome in their child's school than those who attend non-DEIS schools who do not have a HSCL (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010). Research done by O'Toole (2016) found that parents valued the role of the HSCL and noted that the HSCL bridged the divide between parents and teachers, therefore allowing for a more balanced approach to power and a more open, happy and welcoming school environment with less fear of intimidation. The HSCL can be of particular value to families during educational transition (O'Toole, 2016) when children transition from preschool to primary, primary to secondary or secondary to higher education, or transfer to a new school during the school year.

One of the primary aims of the HSCL is to promote partnerships and collaboration between the various elements of a child's mesosystem, namely the home, school and community, through a solution-focused lens. The HSCL aims to provide equitable family engagement opportunities for all and works to promote reciprocal relationships between the families and the school to ensure that all families feel valued and respected. The role of the HSCL strives to provide equity in education by valuing the varying elements that every family and every child brings to the school community.

2.5.3 Home-School Relationships and SES

SES and social class have been identified as mediating factors in the relationship between child achievement and parental involvement and engagement (Gilleece,

2015). The degree of parental engagement or involvement can be influenced by social class, poverty, parental attitudes, family ethnicity, maternal mental health and maternal education (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Studies show that parental involvement in school is more than four times as important than socio-economic class in influencing the academic performance of young people (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003), highlighting the importance of ensuring that all schools prioritise it. Parental involvement and investment in education and learning can provide a pathway in which children and families at risk of educational disadvantage may combat socio-economic factors that put them at risk (Erola, Jalonon & Lenti, 2016). Studies show that the quality of the home learning environment is more important for a child's development than social class, parent education or parent income (Sylva et al., 2004), highlighting the importance of ensuring that the connections between the home and school and the opportunities for parental engagement and involvement in school are optimal, as is the aim of this research. It is critical not to make assumptions that low-SES parents are not interested in their children's education (Hartas, 2008) but instead to acknowledge that various factors may be at play for parents which may inhibit their ability to engage, some of which are outlined in this research.

Hayes et al. (2017) argue that parents from minority backgrounds can be less involved with their children's education for a variety of reasons and that this runs the risk of the mesosystem being weakened. Research carried out by Nzinga-Johnson et al. (2009) outlines that fewer parents from low-SES (who have low education levels) are involved in school life compared to parents with high maternal education levels. Numerous barriers can exist for low-SES families in becoming involved in school life, including linguistic barriers (Scribner, Young & Pedrosa, 1999) (see section 2.5.4) and unfamiliarity with the importance of engagement with school for some low-SES families (Lott, 2001). According to Hornby and Lafaele (2011), low-SES parents are often aware themselves of the differences between them and other players in their child's education in terms of cultural capital, something which can lead parents to feel intimidated about getting involved in their child's learning, rather than choosing not to be involved (Mulkerrins, 2007). The relationship quality between the parents, teacher and pupils may also be a barrier for families from low-SES backgrounds (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009). Promoting high-quality

relationships between parents, teachers, and communities can encourage low-SES parents to become involved in their children's school life (Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009) and is a priority for this research.

As outlined above, the idea that parents and children from all SES are valued and treated equally within the education system can be disputed, as outlined earlier in this literature review (see section 2.3). Certain cultures, ideas and practices are not equally valued in the traditional education system, according to Trumbull et al. (2001), whereby families from low-SES backgrounds often do not see their cultures reflected in their educational experiences, which may deter parents from getting involved in school life. According to Robinson and Harris (2014), society often has low expectations for children from low-SES backgrounds regarding education. These expectations are often 'self-fulfilling prophecies' whereby this negative stereotyping results in children from low-SES backgrounds having poor educational opportunities and outcomes and parents having poor engagement in their child's education and development. This stereotyping often occurs when the child and the family's culture is different from that of the teachers and school, which in turn creates a barrier for parents and families to engage in meaningful involvement with their child's schooling. There is a risk of social injustice and divisions forming when educational institutes value the cultures and practices of high SES over low-SES (Gilbert, 2008). This must be considered when analysing the strength of home-school relationships and the involvement and engagement of parents in education.

2.5.4 Bronfenbrenner and Home-School Relationships

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) provide us with a lens in which we can view parental involvement and engagement in education, as well as home-school partnerships. The bioecological lens allows us to view parental involvement and engagement in education as "bidirectional, synergistic interrelationships" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 199) and acknowledges the value that parents bring to this relationship.

By framing our understanding of parental involvement, engagement and partnerships around the PPCT model, we can consider multiple factors which are at play in a dynamic and fluid manner (O'Toole et al., 2019). Each of the phases

of Bronfenbrenner's theory outlined in section 2.2 places importance on the interactions that children have with other individuals and with their environments, stating that development evolves from the interplay between an active individual and their environment. This line of thinking suggests that initiatives to increase parental engagement and involvement in schools should focus on the importance of relationships between the two, ensuring a 'reciprocity of exchange' (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Positive, interactive, and high-quality processes or interactions and early learning experiences enable children's development. Positive environments are not enough to enable development, strong relationships are key for social, emotional and cognitive development (Hayes et. al, 2017). The home and school are interdependent but have an influence on the other systems during development. The proximal process and interactions that occur between a parent and their child, and the family and the school over a period of time influence development. This theory allows us to understand the reciprocal relationship between the home and the school (in the mesosystem), and the influences that both have on each other (Kocayoruk 2016). The strengthening of the mesosystem (as is the role of the HSCL) can form a bridge between the home and school environment, and in turn, promote partnerships between the various key players in a child's life.

Children do not advance in isolation and the support and guidance that the adults in a child's life provide have a notable impact on the child's development (Hayes et al., 2017). As outlined the prior experiences, ethnic background and SES (as well as other factors) of a parent, all play a part in their ability to be engaged and involved in their child's education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). O'Toole (2016) argues that the bioecological model allows for parental empowerment and not just parental involvement in education, an idea which is at the forefront of this research. This model of human development places the child at the centre but also considers the impact of outside influences and the context in which they grow up in. The environmental conditions that a child experiences should be explored when looking at parental engagement and involvement, as these conditions can work to hinder or facilitate the level of engagement that a parent has with their child's education (O'Toole et al., 2019). The ever-changing settings that children find themselves located in influence their development both directly and indirectly. The values and beliefs of these settings and contexts

impact and shape both the children and the adults who live in them. Children (and the adults in their lives) experience many different contexts at the same time in their lives, with both school and home usually being two of those, making the importance of linkages between these contexts crucial for development. By using the PPCT model to view parental involvement and engagement in education, we are provided with an opportunity to identify factors which may support or hinder home-school relationships for all parents (O'Toole, 2016).

When considering parental involvement and engagement, the older versions of Bronfenbrenner's theory, focusing on contexts or systems can also be beneficial (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the microsystem (the home and the school), a child experiences varying characteristics of the individuals in this system, including their parents, peers and teachers. The nature of the microsystem of the home and the school varies, as do the experiences and interactions that the child has in both. Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem is defined as a combination of two or more microsystems (Maxwell 2018). As stated, two of the most prominent microsystems in a young child's life are their school or early years setting and their home. The interactions between the elements in a child's mesosystem influence their development and reciprocal communications and relations between the home and school can be of great benefit to children's early development. Berk (2008) suggests that if the relationships in the child's mesosystem are strong, the holistic learning of the child will be promoted, and the development will be scaffolded, an idea which is central to this doctoral research and is prioritised throughout. In the exosystem, the ability of a parent to engage in school life can be dependent on their other commitments such as work (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). School links with the community in the exosystem can influence the level of parental involvement and engagement also, and the likelihood of parents from certain groups attending or engaging in school activities (O'Toole, 2016). The macrosystem, considering the wider social norms and institutions common to varying social classes and cultures, can influence parental engagement in education, as pressures or expectations can be placed on parents based on their position in society (O'Toole, 2016). Finally, the chronosystem influences the level of parental engagement or involvement as parents tend to be most involved and engaged at times of transition and early in a child's

educational journey (O'Toole et al., 2019). Ways and means of ensuring strong, positive home-school relationships will be explored throughout this research.

2.6 Conclusion

To conclude, this literature review intends to critically analyse, evaluate and synthesise existing academic research concerning the topics which underpin this research, namely the chosen theoretical framework, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, SES and educational disadvantage, literacy development (with a particular focus on family literacy) and the importance of home-school relationships, in particular in areas where families are at risk of educational disadvantage, are prioritised in this research. The Irish context is outlined throughout this chapter, with consideration given to relevant international research. Much of the literature and theory in relation to low-SES, parental engagement and literacy development comes from a deficit viewpoint, some of which is outlined in this chapter, however, this research aims to scaffold and support the parents and children in this DEIS band 1 school in a collaborative and positive manner and challenge the deficit viewpoint. This chapter has outlined the importance for equity in education and has explored initiatives put in place in Ireland to support those at risk of educational disadvantage, with a particular focus on the DEIS and HSCL scheme. Family literacy is explored, both family literacy practices and programmes, with benefits to both highlighted. The importance of home-school relationships, and the idea of building towards partnerships in education is outlined.

To conclude, this literature review has provided a comprehensive and objective summary of the relevant literature and has identified gaps in the pre-existing research. The research that has taken place for the purpose of this doctorate (as outlined in the following chapters) aims to build on and add to this pre-existing research and literature. This doctoral research aims to address some of the gaps which have been identified in this chapter and in chapter 1, namely the lack of research from the perspective of the HSCL.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

“No methodology is or should be, cast in stone if we accept that professional intention should be informing research processes, not pre-set ideas about methods of techniques”

(Dadds & Hart 2001, p. 169).

Chapter three outlines the research design for this qualitative study. The chapter begins by outlining the research questions (section 3.2). Section 3.3 explores the use of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory as a lens in which this research was designed and carried out. Next, a brief exploration of the chosen research paradigm (critical theory) is presented in section 3.4. Qualitative research is discussed in section 3.5. Section 3.6 outlines the chosen research approach, action research while considering other research approaches that were not chosen. The chosen data collection methods and instruments used for this research are presented in section 3.7. The chosen data analysis approach for this research is examined in section 3.8. Triangulation, trustworthiness, validity and transferability are considered in section 3.9. The steps taken to ensure this research was carried out in an ethical manner are explored in section 3.10. Finally, the limitations of the study are explored in section 3.11. Chapter 3 concludes with a summary. This chapter outlines the methodology for this research. Chapter 4, titled “Procedures: Action Research cycle” delves into the empirical research undertaken for this doctorate.

In brief, this qualitative action research study explores family literacy and home-school relationships. By designing a set of tailored family literacy workshops, this research provides an understanding of how this type of support may influence a) family literacy and b) home-school links and relationships. This innovative research seeks to be egalitarian, participatory, and emancipatory. An ethic of care has been central to this process. Opportunities for democratic dialogue have been prioritised and a methodology which values and places importance on the participant’s own voices and experiences has been implemented and is at the centre of the research process. This action research

was led by the researcher however parents were encouraged to be active collaborators and participants throughout.

3.2 Research Questions

The aims of this research are in line with those outlined by Noffke (1997) namely to gain an improvement in one's understanding of the topic at hand, to gain a desire to generate knowledge that will benefit the researcher, the participants, and others, and to positively influence education and society. The central aim of this doctoral research is to explore school and parent collaboration, to aid family literacy development and to improve confidence in parents in their ability to support their children's development. When designing the research questions, this was considered.

This research aims to explore the following research questions:

1. According to parents from an area of disadvantage, what are the pre-existing family literacy practices carried out in their homes, and why are they motivated to engage in these practices with their children?
2. What are the barriers and enablers to engaging in family literacy practices and programmes for the families who partook in this research?
3. What outcomes are identified by parents who engaged in these co-designed tailored family literacy workshops?

3.3 Operationalizing Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory

As stated in chapter 2, this research is grounded in a bioecological worldview.

This research aims to use Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory as a lens while also considering the influence of other theories of development (see section 2.2).

As outlined in Xia et al. (2020), this research adheres to the following steps:

1. A developmental outcome of interest was identified,
2. The proximal processes most relevant to the outcome of interest were identified,
3. The relevant person, context and time factors were identified, considering that these interacting variables operate collaboratively rather than independently.

This section aims to identify how the PPCT model is used to frame the current study so that the methodology is designed to interrogate the key processes and PPCT elements. It should be noted at this point, that this is a small-scale qualitative study, therefore the elements do not constitute variables for statistical analysis but rather lenses to be applied. As outlined in section 2.2.1., the PPCT model looks at the process (the stimulating and regular reciprocal interactions that take place between the developing person, others around them and their environment), person, context and time in which development happens. A bioecological lens offers a mechanism to interrogate the complex interactions of family literacy programmes. On the one hand, in family literacy, the child is at the centre and the outcome of interest is the child's language and literacy development supported by the proximal processes involved in family literacy practices. On the other hand, in a family literacy programme, the parent is also the focus of development, where the outcome of interest relevant to the parent is their confidence and competence in engaging in family literacy practices with their child. In this case, the proximal process is the interaction with the tutor, the group, the child and the materials provided in the programme that support and scaffold the parent's engagement with their child.

The proximal process is at the core of any research carried out under the PPCT model. This research looks at the process of the family literacy practices of the families who engaged. This research explores both elements of family literacy (practices in the home and family literacy programmes, as outlined in section 2.4) and offers a tailored, parent-designed set of family literacy workshops, specific to the needs of the children, parents and families involved in order to develop competency and confidence in parents in relation to family literacy practices. This is the developmental outcome of interest for this research and is at the forefront throughout. The proximal process became increasingly complex over time with the development of skills from workshop one to four. Workshops began with a mostly oral and practical focus and ended with a more structured literacy focus (through the library visit and shared reading experience). The interviews that were carried out for this research aimed to gather information on the participant's common interactional patterns, for example, the types of family literacy practices that take place in the home and the local environment typically and the duration

and frequency of these activities, rather than one-off experiences (as outlined in Navarro et. al, 2022). Proximal processes are the "primary engines of development" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 798) and work synergistically with the other three factors, person, context and time, all of which will be outlined below.

The effects of proximal processes vary dependent on the developing person's characteristics, meaning that person characteristics act as both an input (as an antecedent of the proximal process) and as an output (an outcome of the interaction between the person, proximal process and context over time) (Navarro, et al., 2022). The child is the person at the centre of this research; however, child outcomes are not assessed as this was deemed to be beyond the scope of this study. Person characteristics were considered through the reports that parents provided through the PEG and the pre and post-workshop interviews with the parents who engaged. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory takes three types of characteristics into account, dispositions or force characteristics, resource characteristics and demand characteristics (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Force characteristics or dispositions include personality traits that can either support or hinder proximal processes. In the case of this research, dispositions such as motivation towards engaging in family literacy and interest in literacy development were considered. Resource characteristics include experiential, biological or mental resources that a person possesses which they bring with them to proximal processes (Xia et al., 2020), these include pre-existing language and communication skills, as well as prior exposure to the development of literacy skills in the case of this research. Finally, demand characteristics are those which are visible, which in the case of this research include gender, race, culture and age, and can be seen to encourage or discourage reactions from the environment, therefore helping or hindering proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). I did not attempt to choose participants who differed according to characteristics, instead, differences and similarities emerged throughout the research process and in the interviews pre and post-workshops.

The context in which the proximal process takes place has always been central to Bronfenbrenner's theories. The context for this research is a DEIS band

1 primary school in an area of socio-economic and educational disadvantage, placing socio-economic status as one of the contextual influences of interest. The research is set in the school and the local environment and focuses on the context of the home and the local environment (locations for family literacy practices which are developed through the proximal processes). The importance of strong home-school relationships and links are relevant to the context in the case of this research as it ties two aspects of the microsystem (the home and the school) together, focussing on the mesosystem. The attributes of home environments where family literacy practices are encouraged are explored through all data collection tools for this research. Although many other contextual factors are at play for all children, parents, and families, as outlined by Xia et al. (2020), "operationalising of the PPCT model does not require the inclusion of all contextual layers" (p. 15)

The final element of the PPCT model, time, consists of three types of time: micro-, meso- and macro-time. Microtime refers to the extent of continuity or discontinuity in the proximal process or interaction. This was observed and supported through the use of informal field notes. Good practice was modelled by both the co-facilitating parent and I, and positive reinforcement was provided for successful engagement from families. Mesotime refers to the frequency of the proximal processes and in the case of this research the workshops ran for 45 minutes for four weeks, due to the suggestions of the PEG (who noted that any longer and parents may be unable to commit or may lose interest). Parents were encouraged to implement and practice ideas gained from the workshops at home and this was discussed during the focus group discussion and the interviews, but this was not measured. When considering macrotime, this research took place during the school year 2021/2022, shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures (schools closed from March- September 2020 and again from January- March 2021). This is of importance to this research as it had implications for parental engagement in education due to restrictions for the two years that went before. As stated, the workshops were designed to support parents of children in both Early Start and junior infants and were run in May 2022 to support the children's transition to their new class for September, an important time in a child's life and development and also to provide parents with resources and ideas to be implemented during the summer months when the

school would be closed, and children may be exposed to less literacy focussed experiences. It is crucial to acknowledge that all four elements of the PPCT have a synergistic relation with each of the others. Therefore, throughout this research, elements will not always be examined individually but will be considered in relation to each other to address and answer the research questions.

3.4 Research Paradigm

The assumptions that a researcher has about reality and knowledge are critical to how they design their research process (Crotty, 1998). According to Greene (1994), “labels ought not matter...what matters is a quest for new ways of living together, of generating more and more incisive and inclusive dialogues” (p. 459). Upon designing this research, many different ‘labels’ were considered, in particular the interpretivist school of thought and critical theory. Interpretivism aims to explore the interpretations of a particular group of individuals “about the social phenomena they interact with” in their context (Rehman & Alharti, 2016, p. 55). While interpretivist research aims to work closely with the participants to gain a deep understanding of the research subject, this research paradigm does not prioritise empowering individuals and societies (Riyami, 2015). This doctoral research aims to engage with the social, cultural, relational, and temporal contexts of the participants, through the lens of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory and is underpinned by a sense of social justice, therefore critical theory was considered to be a more appropriate research paradigm for this research.

Critical theory is the research paradigm which I believe best represents the worldview that underpins this research. Critical theory is a collaborative approach which enables the participants to be active agents in the research and endeavours to highlight and question the oppressive structures which create inequality in society (Riyami, 2015). It goes beyond recording observations, analysing, and exploring them, and aims to offer an opportunity for reformation. The critical paradigm aims to put forward new perspectives and priorities not only contributing to the world of knowledge but to the world itself (Asghar, 2013). Critical theorists consider that “research should contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21) and that research participants should be involved in identifying issues in their own

situations and in exploring actions to lead to enhancement. According to Giangreco and Taylor (2003), research that is carried out using the critical theory approach focuses on the experiences, thoughts, and perspectives of the participants and "hopefully helps us to better understand our world so that we can strive to improve it" (p. 134). The researcher also plays a vital role whereby their social, political and cultural perspectives should be acknowledged. The involvement of the researcher in the research, and their engagement with the participants influences the research and according to Connolly (2008), the research process is reliant on the relationship between the researcher and the participants. My role as the HSCL in the school, whereby it is a daily aim of mine to form partnerships with parents and to build relationships was conducive to the development of the relationship with the participants in both the PEG and the workshops. By incorporating the ideas, advice and expertise of the PEG to design the set of family literacy workshops for other participants, and placing them in a position of 'expert', the power imbalance that may have existed prior to this was considered. This genuine engagement from the PEG offered an opportunity for the research (and indeed the school) to acknowledge the parents as experts.

As outlined by O'Toole (2016), "engagement with real-world problems and the lives of real people is key to a critical paradigm and is also a core aim of the bioecological perspective" (p.213). Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model places emphasis and importance on relationships, processes and person factors while considering context also. This research explores the processes of family literacy and home-school relationships, as well as the barriers that may exist and are underpinned by a sense of social justice while prioritising the voice of the participants. This qualitative research aims to genuinely engage with parents through a critical theory lens while considering Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model.

3.5 Research Methodology

Qualitative research is the chosen methodology for this doctoral research, as it aims to explore the "complexities of the social world in which we live and how we go about thinking, acting and making meaning in our lives" (Eilis, 2004, p. 25). It aims to generate knowledge about human experience (Sandelowski, 2004) by

exploring the lived experiences of individuals. Qualitative research allows researchers to interpret certain phenomena (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). According to Smith and Osborn (2008), this type of research can attempt to describe and interpret the social and personal experiences of participants. The qualitative research methodology allows for a deep understanding, depth and richness and aligns with critical theory's focus on power dynamics and social inequalities. By combining a critical theory approach and a qualitative methodology, the researcher has an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of social issues and power dynamics which may be at play for individuals. Qualitative research prioritises rich descriptions and captures the perspectives of the individual. The researcher has the opportunity to delve into a topic, to engage with the participants and to learn from them (Kozleski, 2017). It provides a deeper understanding of social situations and interactions (Silverman, 2013) as well as detailed descriptions of particular circumstances (Silverman, 2016). Researcher bias or subjectivity can be an issue in qualitative research; however, in the case of this research, has been considered through continued reflexive engagement (see section 0). Other limitations of qualitative research include a lack of generalizability (Flick, 2014), and more difficult data interpretation and analysis procedures (Richards & Richards, 1994). According to Lederman and Lederman (2015), qualitative research is "as valuable and can contribute as much to our knowledge of teaching and learning as quantitative research" (p. 596). This research aims to gain a deep understanding of the pre-existing family literacy practices of the families who engage in this research and to offer a tailored family literacy programme to develop these practices and skills for parents in the school community while developing parent confidence and home-school relationships, therefore a qualitative approach was more suitable to this research than a quantitative approach. Quantitative research offers many advantages including the ability to easily measure and present clear objective data (Daniel, 2016) and the ability to test hypotheses clearly and in a structured manner (Muijs, 2004), however, it does not prioritise the rich and real descriptions and opinions that the participants can express through the qualitative approach, as is the case for this research. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model can be used as a theoretical framework for both qualitative and quantitative research and

in the case of this research forms the theoretical underpinning for exploring the participant's engagement with the research in a qualitative manner.

3.6 Research Approach

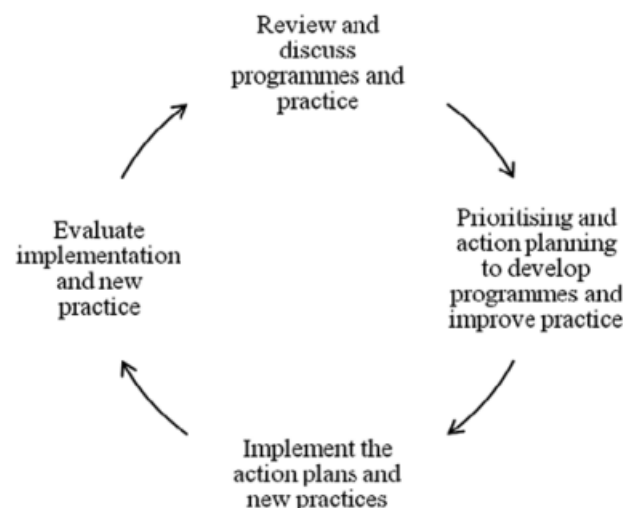
The chosen research approach for this doctoral study is Action Research (AR). This action research is researcher led with parents encouraged to be active collaborators and participants. My epistemological and ontological viewpoints based on the ideas of critical theory and social justice, warrant action research as the research approach of choice due to its collaborative nature which aims to prioritise the genuine and active engagement of participants, as is the case for this research (see section 3.6.1 for other research approaches which were considered). The bioecological theoretical stance underpinning this research requires a research approach which can enable the researcher to explore the learning environments that the participants and their families are part of in a holistic way and keeping this in mind AR was deemed the most suitable research approach.

Action research can be defined as “a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing...it seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.1). Action researchers consider that positive social change and social justice are best achieved with the participation of members of the community upon which the research focuses (McIntyre, 2008). Action research is a powerful tool for change and improvement (Cohen et al., 2007) and prioritises respect for the knowledge, experiences and thoughts of the participants, while focusing on community-based collaboration (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003). Action researchers are focused on positive change and often work with marginalised communities to attempt to address inequalities and strive to achieve real outcomes with their participants. The idea of raising the self-esteem of minority groups through their development and involvement in action research was considered by Kurt Lewin (1946) and has laid the foundations for collective and collaborative research with a commitment to social change. Somekh and

Zeichner (2009) argue that action research is "grounded in the values and culture of its participant-researchers and as such is flexible to local agency" (p. 6). According to Brydon-Miller et al. (2003), action research has three basic values including respect for the participants and their knowledge, confidence in the democratic process and a pledge to action, all of which are crucial to this study. Action research is systematic and cyclical in nature (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005) and prioritises the steps of reflecting, planning, acting, observing and reflecting again (Dickens & Watkins, 1999). The process as outlined by Bleach (2013) is illustrated in figure 1 below.

Figure 1

The Action Research Process (Bleach, 2013)



This research considered the concept of first-, second- and third- person framework as outlined by Reason and Torbert (2001). First- person research is described by Reason and Torbert (2001) as “skills and methods [that] address the ability of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act awaredly and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting” (p17). This stage of the framework encourages the researcher to develop their own skills and understanding, to assess the impact of the actions on others and to critically explore their own purposes and behaviours (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Second- person research includes creating opportunities for communities and groups to inquire, converse and learn, and offers an opportunity for co-

research and transformation if the process is carried out in a supportive and appropriate manner (Reason & Torbert, 2001). It paves the way for democratic dialogue and allows for mutual inquiry opportunities. Third- person research “aims to create a wider community of inquiry...thus empowering participants to create their own knowing-in-action in collaboration with others” (Reason & Torbert, 2001, p. 23). This part of the framework explores how the research being carried out contributes to wider theory and practice. All three practices reinforce each other and lead to transformation. First, second and third- person research are considered throughout this doctoral research.

As outlined, it was intended that this doctoral research would be carried out under the research approach of PAR. Due to limitations (as outlined in section 3.11) the research was deemed to be action research, with a focus on encouraging parents to be active collaborators and participants. The ideas of reflection and action are crucial elements of action research, in particular in the case of this action research study, which aimed to ensure that participating parents were active participants and key collaborators in the research design and implementation. This research offered a “communicative space” as outlined by Hockley (2012), whereby an opportunity for the voice of the parent to be heard was offered. This research approach considered the fundamentals of critical theory and social justice.

This action research approach allowed for Bronfenbrenner and Morris’ (2006) PPCT model to be considered by involving participants as co-constructors of the research and by examining the development in the proximal processes identified over time in relation to the person, context and time elements. This action research aimed to address perceived social inequalities, as is an underpinning element of the critical theory approach. When combined, AR and a critical theory approach can facilitate collaborative and transformative change by empowering individuals and communities to identify and address important issues, as is the case for this research through the participation of the PEG. The action research cycle undertaken for this research is outlined in detail in chapter 4.

3.6.1 Alternative Research Approaches

Upon planning this research, alternative research approaches to AR were considered, namely participatory action research (PAR), design-based research (DBR) and case study. The key commonalities and differences between the research approach chosen for this study and alternative research approaches were considered. Upon consideration of the below brief comparisons, AR was deemed the most appropriate of the approaches for this research.

In the planning of this research, it was intended that the chosen research approach would be Participatory Action Research. As distinct from action research, participatory action research foregrounds the role of the participants in the research process. Participatory Action Research (PAR) has been used in various fields and disciplines, in particular in the area of education since its origin in the 1960s. PAR aims to ensure that the voices of the participants are heard and prioritises the co-generation of new knowledge in response to a specific need or issue (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). It is a collaborative process in which the researcher works with the members of a local community to encourage these members to challenge barriers that they are facing on a specific topic in a systematic and effective way and to examine the issues they encounter in order to solve these problems (Pant, 2014; Patton, 2014). One of the key values of PAR is that research is conducted *with* participants and not *on* participants (Herr & Anderson, 2015). PAR was originally designed to address issues with disadvantaged members of society (Calhoun & Karaganis, 2001) and aims to use the knowledge and experiences of these members to address inequality (including socio-economic and educational inequality as is the case for this research) and tackle power imbalances in a context-specific situation by concentrating on their needs. PAR is carried out through a cycle of research, action, and reflection (Gaffney, 2008). Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) offer us an acronym to remember the process of PAR:

Planning a change,
Acting and observing the process and consequences of change,
Reflecting on these processes and consequences and then replanning,
acting and observing, reflecting and so on (p. 595).

Like action research, participatory action research is cyclical and involves the participants in the research, however, it offers a slightly different approach than

action research. In comparison to action research, participatory action research prioritises the participant's views and expertise and aims to build the participant's capacity (Gaffney, 2008). Participatory action research follows several steps and includes the participants in all stages, valuing experiential knowledge. PAR does not follow a specific set of steps but is cyclical in nature (Cornish, et al., 2023). This type of research focuses on the cycle of pinpointing a problem, making a plan, executing the plan known as the 'action stage', monitoring the changes, and reflecting and evaluating these changes. Relationships are key for success in participatory action research and are prioritised more so than in action research, in order to make it a truly collaborative process (Gaffney, 2008). Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) give an example of PAR in education as an opportunity for teachers and parents to work together on a common goal as equal partners. PAR initially seemed an appropriate fit for this research however as the research progressed it became apparent that full participatory action would not be possible, partially due to the commitment needed and to participant prior commitments. While the original intention was to be involved in all stages, including in the findings, it was clear from the engagement with the group of parents that they acted rather as consultants than a participatory group. An exception to this limitation was Asyah, the parent who helped to co-facilitate the workshops in Arabic, who participated in various elements of the research and was an important enabler for parents. Another limitation which prevented this research from being fully participatory was that the PEG did not have an active role in the collation or presentation of the findings. Therefore, AR was identified as more appropriate for this research than PAR.

Wang and Hannafin (2005) define DBR as a "systematic but flexible methodology aimed to improve educational practices through iterative analysis, design, development and implementation, based on collaboration among researchers and practitioners in real-world settings, and leading to contextually sensitive design principles and theories" (p. 6-7). Similar to AR, participant engagement and feedback are valued, and the research follows a pre-designed and flexible process. However, there are some key differences between the two approaches. DBR often aims to combine with external research to contribute to knowledge and theory in its chosen area, while also seeking to find a resolution to the problem identified. It has a stronger focus on generalizability and theory

building, while possible this is not the goal of action research. AR focuses mainly on a local level and prioritises internal research in a context-specific situation, as is the case for this research.

Case study research can be described as a research approach which explores a specific context through in-depth data collection (Creswell et al., 2007). The case study provides comprehensive descriptions and rich information on the topic being researched, as provided by the participants however it does not prioritise action or change. This doctoral research aims to collect this rich data through the use of focus groups and interviews while gaining a heightened understanding of the views and values that the participants place on education. However, it also aims to go beyond this and prioritises collaboration with the participants to design a set of tailored family literacy workshops while integrating their input and cultivating home-school relationships. Upon consideration of the above brief comparisons, in the case of this research, AR was deemed the most appropriate of the approaches outlined above.

3.7 Research Methods

According to David Silverman (2013) "research methods should be chosen based on the specific task at hand" (p.10). When choosing the research methods most suitable for this primary data research, several factors highlighted in the Research for Fieldwork module undertaken during the Doctorate in Education were considered. The appropriateness of the methods in relation to the research questions was explored. The methods chosen were also deemed ethically appropriate. The importance of ensuring that the correct research methodologies are used when conducting research through the paradigm of critical theory (Hooley, 2002) was considered. The methods chosen ensured that a deep exploration of power dynamics and potential social inequalities were allowed for, as well as focussing on the importance of exploring the lived experiences of the participants. The idea of action research as a research approach which requires methods that encourage participation and collaboration with the participants, with an aim to empowering the participants to generate knowledge and engage in inclusive and transformative research, was considered when choosing the research methods for this AR study.

Upon consideration of the above points, the data generation methods chosen for this research were focus group, individual semi-structured interviews and to a much lesser extent, field notes. The relationship between the tools themselves, the research paradigm and the conceptual framework was considered. The methods complemented each other and allowed for improved validity and trustworthiness (see section 3.9).

3.7.1 Focus Groups

Focus groups can be used for “the generation of new ideas formed within a social context” (Breen, 2006, p. 466). This research method allows data to be generated from a range of different positions and provides shared opinions of the same phenomena. Focus groups can be useful for collecting quick, low-cost qualitative data on developing themes, values, and opinions from different subgroups of the population and allow the generation of hypotheses from the insights that are collected from that group (Bailey 1994; Krueger, 1998; Morgan, 1988; Robson, 2002). They are particularly useful in the early stages of research as a method of exploring relevant issues with participants, as is the case with this research. Focus groups, when facilitated well, encourage participants to voice their opinions and ideas and facilitate participants to speak out. They allow the researcher to include non-literate participants. According to Morgan (1988), focus groups provide a collective viewpoint, based on a topic provided by the researcher. Breen (2006) argues that focus groups should “generate ideas for the purpose of devising recommendations for future changes and improvements” (p. 464) and should be a rewarding learning experience for the participants. Smithson (2000) argues that it is important to consider focus groups as “performances in which the participants jointly produce accounts about proposed topics in a socially organised situation” (p. 105).

In contrast to individual interviews, focus groups produce data through social interactions (Morgan, 1997). In comparison to other research methods, the interactions between participants are witnessed during focus groups and this should be considered during the planning, implementation, and analysing stages of the research. Smithson (2000) states that focus groups allow access to shared and collective knowledge, deep dialogue and create a clearer picture than would

be possible through the use of individual interviews, as is particularly appropriate for an AR study carried out under the critical theory lens. Specifically, focus groups support the exploration of ideas and help to amplify the voices of marginalised groups and can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of social issues. Focus groups are a useful research method when conducting action research as they allow for rich and descriptive insights while promoting genuine engagement from participants.

Although useful for deriving data around interaction, disadvantages lie with the focus group method also. According to Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2007), the contrived nature of the focus group is a downfall of the method as it creates an unnatural setting at times and may lead to unreliable data. Breen (2006) lists several disadvantages of using focus groups namely the reliance on participants to engage at a set time, the time-consuming nature of the method, the possibility of dominant participants and the context-specific data that is generated which may not be generalisable. Smithson (2000) argues that focus groups have limitations (including normative discourse, conflicts within the group and dominant opinions) that can be usually overcome through effective moderation.

The idea of participant voice is discussed in Smithson (2000). Both the individual voice and the collective voice are considered. The reality that some voices are overrepresented (which can lead to the overrepresentation of certain opinions over others) is explored. Smithson and Diaz (1996) suggest that the collective voice is constructed through an active group process and is a joint collaborative product of interactions. This has both its advantages and disadvantages, namely the opportunity for discussions to develop that may not have arisen in the individual interview setting, while also considering the possibility of the dominant voice which may have the power to dictate the topic. The focus group in this research was based on an adapted version of the child's right to participation as outlined in Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (Lundy, 2007) (see Figure 2). This model considers the importance of providing an inclusive opportunity for participation (space), the facilitation of participants to express their views (voice), the opportunity for these views to be heard and listened to (audience) and commitment to act on these views (influence). The use of the focus group in this research is outlined in detail in section 4.2.1.

Figure 2

Lundy's Model of Participation (2007)



3.7.2 Semi-Structured Interview

As distinct from focus groups, interviews allow the researcher an opportunity to engage with the participants on a one-to-one basis. Interviews are a dialogical and conjoint method of gathering data and allow the opportunity to understand, evaluate and assess a situation (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2018). They are an effective method of qualitative data generation as they offer an opportunity to explore issues in depth (Hochschild, 2009). Interviews are not to be seen as a method of 'extracting data', but as a means to generate data which is a product of interactions, with the quality of that data being dependent on the quality of the interview and the interactions with the interviewee. Individual interviews allow for a deep understanding of social issues and can help to promote social change, through a critical theory lens. In action research, semi-structured interviews allow for open and flexible conversations where participants have an opportunity to share their perspectives, experiences and knowledge, ensuring that their voices are central to the research.

Kvale (1996) describes interviews as an interchange of views between two people who have an interest in a similar topic and outlines a step-by-step plan to

aid researchers when conducting interviews. He outlines some key characteristics of a high-quality qualitative research interview, which include:

- the use of natural language by the researcher,
- openness and not overly pre-structured,
- engagement and understanding of the participants and the topic,
- a positive and enriching experience for the interviewee (Kvale, 1996).

Semi-structured interviews allow a flow to the interview, while at the same time are based on an interview guide or schedule (Bailey, 2007). This type of interview allows the interviewer to engage in dialogue with the interviewee and accommodates a certain level of flexibility, which was seen as an advantage in this case, as it could be seen that I was in almost a position of power, being the HSCL in the school at the time. The variation between individual interviews can be a disadvantage to this type of qualitative data generation method. The wording of the questions may vary in different interviews and this can reduce the comparability of the responses, a factor which was considered when conducting the semi-structured interviews for this research. The idea that Stone and Shiffman (2002) put forward whereby undue weight can often be given to the most recent events during the interview process, therefore leading to potentially inaccurate reflections has been considered. Interpretation of data during and after the interview whereby the interviewer engages in first, second and third-order constructs was at the forefront of the analysis process for the data analysis of these semi-structured interviews. The use of semi- structured interviews in this study is outlined in detail in section 4.4.1.

3.7.3 Field Notes

Field notes are a qualitative research method which can allow the researcher to record both in-depth descriptions and rich reflections during the research process. Field notes can be a valuable tool in critical theory research as they can capture social interactions, power dynamics and lived experiences, providing rich qualitative data. Field notes can be a useful tool for AR, as they allow the researcher to capture observations, interactions and reflections throughout the research process, while also allowing for reflexive engagement on behalf of the

researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Field notes are contextual and can include recorded observations, reflections or impressions made by the researcher during the fieldwork and can capture details about the interactions, behaviours or practices witnessed. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest that an organised approach to field notes is most effective including the use of templates or frameworks and outline the importance of reflecting on field notes to identify emerging patterns or themes. Field notes can be used for triangulation purposes when not the primary source of data, as is the case for this research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The use of field notes in this study is outlined in brief in section 4.3.3.

3.7.4 Alternative Research Methods

Other research methods were considered when designing and planning this action research. Surveys and questionnaires were considered as a method of collecting data from the participants in a quick way which did not require as much of a commitment from the participants as the focus group or individual interviews did, however the idea that some parents did not speak English as their first language was considered, as was the possibility of the lack of literacy skills among some of the parents. The possibility of misinterpretation of responses and limited depth were also outlined as limitations of questionnaires and surveys (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Ethnography was considered at the initial planning stages of this research also; however, it was ruled out due to its potentially subjective nature, the time frame in which this research needed to be completed, and due to potential ethical issues, such as participant privacy (Cohen et al., 2018).

3.8 Data Analysis

According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), "data analysis is central to credible qualitative research" (p. 3351). Thematic analysis is the chosen approach for this research and is defined as a "process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data" (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3352). This type of analysis aims to interpret data and not just organise or summarise it through careful reading and re-reading of the data (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest

that thematic analysis is commonly used in qualitative research and allows for a concise and detailed description of the patterns and frequent emerging themes. They outline that it is a flexible approach which can provide a rich and complex description of the data generated. They consider that thematic analysis should be driven by the specific research questions and the researcher's theoretical assumptions. According to Breen (2006), both interviews and focus groups generate qualitative data, which "should be recorded, transcribed and analysed usually by searching for themes that occur" (p. 466). Thematic analysis must be consistent and be conducted in a "rigorous and methodical manner to yield meaningful and useful results" (Nowell et al., 2017, p.1). Thorne (2000) suggests that although data analysis is the most challenging step for the researcher when conducting qualitative research, it is often the area which is given little thought in the finished written product. Although it can be challenging to carry out (Clarke & Braun, 2013), thematic data analysis is a valuable method for informing action in action research, as is the case for this research.

Braun and Clarke (2006) outline a six-step plan of guidelines which can be followed when carrying out thematic analysis. The first step is to collect and familiarise oneself with the data. Coding of the data in relation to relevant themes (both emerging and a priori from the relevant literature) follows, whereby the researcher identifies initial common threads or contradictions. More extensive coding is involved in the next step, where code categories are outlined. Themes are reviewed, and the conceptual framework is considered. Data is then organised, defined and organised by theme, addressing research questions throughout. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide, data analysis phases do not have to be linear. The iterative steps involved in structured data analysis mean that it is researcher-active and aims to mitigate any bias that the researcher may have due to their positionality by promoting reflexivity throughout. Thematic analysis is often the chosen analysis approach for critical theory research. The critical theory lens in which this research was developed allows for the examination of the data considering social inequalities and power dynamics that may be at play and prioritises exploring the participants' experiences.

Cohen et al. (2007) offer 5 ways to present data analysis- by groups, by individuals, by issue, by research questions and by instrument; the data collected for this research has been analysed by issue. Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model was

prioritised throughout and is evident in the data analysis presented in chapters 4 and 5. The four elements of the PPCT model, 'person', 'process', 'context' and 'time' are at the forefront of the data analysis.

The data analysis for the focus group differed slightly from that of the individual interviews and the field notes. When analysing individual interviews and focus groups, it is essential to consider that these conversations are not occurring naturally but are taking place in a specific and controlled setting in the presence of the researcher (Smithson, 2000). According to Krueger (2002), analysis of focus groups should begin informally during the focus group itself. Confirmation of critical ideas should be pursued to attempt to avoid misinterpretation. Immediately after the focus group, the researcher should note critical themes and ideas and ensure the recording is clear and sufficient for later analysis. For validity and trustworthiness in analysis, the group must be analysed, not the individuals within the group (Krueger, 1998). The researcher should aim to identify emerging themes and sequence the analysis by theme or by question. When reporting the findings from the focus group data generation, it is crucial to consider that this is a reinterpretation of the participant's positions. Krueger (2002) highlights that when analysing the data, the researcher should be mindful of the internal consistency of the responses, the frequency and extensiveness of certain topics in the discussion and the intensity or depth of feeling in which the participants speak about certain topics. He outlines how specific responses based on real-life experiences should often be given more depth than vague ones. Considerations on best practices when analysing focus groups, as discussed above, were at the forefront of the PEG analysis (see section 4.2.1.4). The data analysis process that was undertaken for this research is outlined in section 4.5.

3.9 Triangulation, Trustworthiness & Transferability

3.9.1 Validity, Trustworthiness, Rigour and Transferability

Validity is an important factor and a requirement for qualitative research and can be more challenging to present than that in quantitative research. According to Winter (2000), although 100% validity may not be possible, it can be considered through the use of triangulation (see section 3.9.2), the objectivity of the

researcher (although full objectivity cannot be) and through the collection of honest, rich data. I engaged in constant reflexivity throughout the research process, which aimed to reinforce the validity and trustworthiness of this critical theory research (see section 4.3). Collaborating with the participants in the 'planning' and 'action' stages of this action research project aimed to add to the trustworthiness and validity of the process and the findings. According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), "data analysis is central to credible qualitative research" (p. 3351). They outline that a lack of rigorous data analysis can have implications for the credibility of the research, which was kept in mind throughout the data analysis phase of this research. This is a qualitative, small-scale, context-specific research project, and so the transferability or the ability of this research to be applied in other contexts or situations was not at the forefront of this research; however, this research aimed to provide valuable insights and findings within a specific context (this DEIS band 1 school). These rich findings are explored in chapters 4 and 5.

3.9.2 Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources or research methods to validate and strengthen research findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this action research, three types of triangulation were prioritised- triangulation of methods, investigator triangulation and the prioritisation of both the individual and the shared voice.

Three research methods were used to gather data to triangulate, namely focus group, individual interviews and, to a much lesser extent, field notes. According to Heale and Forbes (2013), triangulation increases confidence in the findings and aims to produce a more comprehensive picture. Triangulation can add strength to research and can strengthen trustworthiness and credibility by implementing several methods. This form of triangulation aimed to allow for convergence of results. In the case of this doctoral research, I carried out investigator triangulation (as discussed by Denzin, 1970); being the main researcher, I requested the support of my research supervisors to cross-check and cross-examine the literature, methodology and findings continuously. This research was also presented at numerous conferences, webinars, and discussion

groups in various stages of its progression (see introduction), where the thoughts and valued opinions of others, both nationally and internationally, were considered. The use of individual interviews and focus groups in this action research study aimed to allow for the inclusion of the individual and shared voice of this group of parents and aimed to achieve triangulation in this way. The PEG, in particular, were encouraged to genuinely participate by being offered the opportunity to view the data and results at two time points, after transcription and after analysis, and their thoughts and opinions on both were valued and considered. Finally, the use of recurring central themes throughout the data analysis aimed to gain triangulation through exploring the commonalities and differences between the opinions and thoughts of the participants in the PEG and the pre and post-workshop interviews.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought and granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Education, Trinity College, in April 2020. An updated application for ethical approval was submitted after the confirmation interview to include some suggestions, including the addition of the focus groups (see Appendix E for proof of ethical approval) in August 2021. All research was carried out as was approved in the application. All research adhered to Trinity College's policy on Good Research Practice and ensured respect and justice for all participants, beneficence, and the absence of maleficence. To gain background knowledge on research integrity, I completed the *Epigeum Research Integrity* online course in Social and Behavioural Sciences and the GDPR online training module as recommended by TCD.

Core to all ethical research is participant consent. Before data generation began, the informed consent of the school's Board of Management, Principal, and all participants was obtained through consent forms and information sheets (see appendices). In this AR study, the participants were invited not only as informants but also as collaborators to a degree, therefore clear, concise, and relevant information and explanations were critical. In addition to the consent sheets and information sheets, a video was distributed through the school app and website explaining the research to engage parents who may have had

difficulty engaging with the more traditional information sheet. The Plain English Guidelines (NALA, 2008) and the NALA (2011c) writing and design tips were used in all communications with participants to ensure that parents with English as an additional language or who may have difficulties understanding written communications were accommodated.

All parents approached to partake in the PEG, and the workshops were informed that participation was entirely voluntary and that withdrawal from the study at any time was possible without prejudice or judgement. Parents were informed that there was no extra credit for agreeing to participate in this study and that they were free to talk to me or an independent party about the research process. Confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy were prioritised, and the participants were not identifiable in the finished report. Data storage procedures were followed throughout.

The consideration of the role of the researcher was prioritised throughout this research to ensure that the research was always carried out in an ethical manner. The perceived position of power and the power dynamics at play were considered. The genuine engagement of participants in the 'planning' and 'action' sections of this action research aimed to ensure that participants were active agents in this research and aimed to alleviate the potential power imbalance. I was aware throughout the research that my positionality and values may have been of influence on the research process and carried out first person reflective practice throughout (see section 4.3.3 and section 7.1.1). I was also acutely aware of my actions throughout the research process and took steps to reduce any perceived power dynamics such as greeting all participants with a friendly smile and by their first names, creating a welcoming and inclusive environment (down to small gestures such as the set-up of the room, the offering of tea and coffee) and scheduling all meetings with participants at times that suited them. To conclude, every effort was made to ensure that this research was carried out in an ethical manner.

3.11 Limitations

This qualitative research was subject to a number of limitations, which will be acknowledged in this section. Firstly, the possibility that the chosen data

collection methods would not elicit in-depth and rich descriptions from the participants was considered before the data collection took place; however, careful planning of the schedules for both the focus group and the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix F, G and H) and the facilitation of a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere was prioritised. As outlined above in section 0, my positionality as the researcher within this research may have influenced the responses from the parents who participated and may have acted as a limitation; however, through reflexivity, I considered this throughout. The subjective nature of critical theory research can be a limitation; however, this was also considered through engaging in regular reflective practice.

This fieldwork was carried out within one academic year in the specific context I work in this urban DEIS band 1 primary school. It should be acknowledged that this is a small-scale research project focussing only on one group of participants- the parents of Early Start, junior infants and first class children. Although small scale, this research aimed to be in-depth. The results and findings are not representative of the values, opinions or ideas of parents or teachers in DEIS schools locally or nationally, and the findings should not be generalised; they are context-specific. From the outset, the research focused on only a small number of participants; however, the depth of the data generated aimed to account for the project's small scale. Only one cycle of action research was recorded and analysed for this research due to time constraints (primarily due to COVID-19); however, the workshops have been run for a second time with the parents of children in Early Start and junior infants in the academic year 2022/2023. Some moderations have been made to the workshop schedule after the recommendations from the post-workshop interviews; therefore, the action research is still running on a local level but has not been analysed for this thesis (see section 5.3.4 for details).

As outlined in section 3.6.1, in the planning of this research, it was intended that the chosen research approach would be Participatory Action Research. This proved challenging as the research developed due to a number of reasons. Firstly, this is a doctoral thesis, with I, the researcher, as leader and author. Although the contributions and ideas of both the participating parents and my research supervisors were crucial to this research, fundamentally doctoral research is typically student led. The contributions and the active collaboration

with the parents in the 'planning' and the 'action' stages of the action research project ensured that the parent voice was paramount, however due to the nature of this doctoral research, full participatory action research was not possible, therefore this research was named as collaborative action research rather than full participatory action research.

It should be noted that while the findings do not all agree with the literature on the area, they are from an opportunistic sample that may not reflect the school population as a whole (although every effort was made to ensure variety in all groups of participants). It should also be noted that this study did not compare with other populations or groups and did not formally measure the outcome of the parents or children involved, as this was beyond the scope of this study. It is possible that the parents who agreed to participate in the PEG partook in the interviews and attended the workshops may be the parents who value education highly, who enjoy being involved in school activities and initiatives and who have a strong relationship with the school. As outlined previously, the consent form and information sheet for the PEG were distributed to thirty-five parents, with six agreeing to participate. The consent form (and video) and information sheet for the workshops and interviews were distributed to sixty parents, with twenty-eight agreeing to participate. It should be considered that the parents who did not participate may not mirror the opinions and actions of those who did. It should also be considered that the non-participant parents may have had additional barriers which deterred them from attending the workshops. Although every effort was made to alleviate barriers for participants, barriers such as lower levels of education, additional responsibilities (such as lone parenting), weaker relationships with the school or feeling marginalised may have been at play for parents who did not participate (Conaty, 2002). It is not clear whether the non-participants did not want to engage, could not engage or did not need to engage (as outlined by Michael, 2004), a limitation of this research and an important factor which may be considered for future research and work in the school. Perhaps the possession of educational capital encouraged some parents to engage (as outlined in Bleach, 2008) or the lack of educational capital discouraged other parents to engage. A lack of data on the reasons for non-participation are a limitation of this research.

The idea of the good respondent should also be considered; perhaps parents felt that they should answer questions in a certain way as the researcher is a teacher in the school, although every effort to ensure that this was not the case was taken by prioritising the genuine engagement of the parents throughout this action research cycle and through researcher reflexivity, both of which should be considered when analysing the data collected for this research. Furthermore, Hartas (2011) explains how the reliance on parental reports to obtain answers on their literacy environment may not be without bias, and this factor should also be considered as most of the data for this thesis was obtained from the parents.

COVID-19 has proven to be a noteworthy challenge and has limited the progress of this research project in a number of ways. The closure of schools and the restrictions in place when schools were opened have all had a noteworthy impact on the timeline initially put in place for this project, as mentioned previously. On a positive note, the parents of these children, more than ever, saw the value of engaging in educational activities in the home with their children, and it is evident from the findings that this research was of value to these parents following the so-called 'online- learning' experience during 2020 and 2021.

3.12 Conclusion

This action research doctoral study has 2 main intentions. Firstly, it aims to facilitate a group of parents to contribute to the co-development of a series of family literacy workshops, which scaffolded other parents in developing family literacy practices. In addition, it aims to build on pre-existing home-school relationships in a school at risk of educational disadvantage and to cultivate interest in home-school relationships. Chapter 3 outlined the methodological underpinnings and the design and operation of this research study. Given the research setting, participants, and my focus as a researcher, the core principles of critical theory (social justice and empowerment) guide this study. Three research questions were outlined, as was an explanation of the use of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory as a lens in which this research was designed and carried out. The action research approach is the most suitable approach to address these research questions through a critical theory lens and was presented in this chapter. This is a qualitative study based on the research

paradigm of critical theory in which my positionality as the researcher in the study and a teacher in the school was considered throughout. The limitations of the study have been outlined, as have ethical considerations. This chapter takes both pre-existing theory and literature into account. The guiding framework of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory was used to structure the critical considerations for this study. The empirical action research, or the 'nuts and bolts', undertaken for this doctoral research will be outlined in chapter 4, as well as some of the initial findings which led to the formation and development of this tailored family literacy programme.

4 Procedures: The Action Research Cycle

4.1 Introduction to the AR cycle

Chapter 4 outlines the action research cycle that was carried out for this study. This chapter is structured by outlining, in order, the three stages of this action research cycle- the 'planning' (section 4.2), 'action' (section 4.3), and 'reflection and evaluation' (section 4.4) stages. This chapter is structured in a slightly less traditional manner and brings the reader through the empirical steps that were taken for this study in the order that they occurred, as well as outlining some of the key findings which led to the development of the workshop design. It incorporates a blend of both methods and findings in order of the steps taken for this study. The chapter begins with a reminder of the research questions and an introduction to the AR cycle, focussing on the participants involved in all three stages. Section 4.2, the planning, outlines the PEG as a focus group, setting out the steps taken in developing, piloting and implementing the focus group schedule. The PEG participant's profiles are presented in section 4.2.2.1, followed by an in-depth analysis of the PEG focus group. This analysis explores family literacy practices, parent characteristics, home-school relationships, barriers to engagement and advice and content for inclusion in the set of family literacy workshops designed for the parents of children in Early Start and junior infants in the school. The planning section, section 4.2, concludes with an outline of the relevant literature and guidelines that, combined with the PEG findings, led to the formation of the family literacy workshop schedule. The 'action' stage is outlined in section 4.3, whereby the schedules for the individual workshop sessions are presented, followed by the workshop participant profiles. The use of field notes informally in the research is touched on briefly. Section 4.3, the 'reflection' and 'evaluation' stages outline the development, piloting and implementation of both the pre and post-workshop interview schedules. The pre and post-workshop interview participant profiles are presented, with the section closing on an important part of this research, my reflexivity, and the role of the researcher. Finally, the data analysis process for the research is presented.

Figure 3

Action Research Timeline



Note: Figure 3 summarises the specifics of the study, detailing the AR stage, participant groups and research methods used to address each research question.

This qualitative action research study endeavoured to engage the participants in the Parent Expert Group (PEG) as active agents in the research by inviting them to co-develop a series of workshops aimed to scaffold the family literacy practices of the families of children in Early Start and junior infants and to nurture home-school relationships. This qualitative research aimed to ensure that parent needs

are met through collaboration with a cohort of the parents themselves, who are seen as the ‘experts’. In contrast to many educational interventions with a deficit approach, this action research recognised the need for genuine participant engagement and respected its participants' individual opinions and viewpoints, aiming to ensure that educational inequality was not reproduced. This research attempted to consider Bronfenbrenner and Morris’ theory (2006) by examining the person (the participants, their SES, gender, culture, pre-existing skills and motivations), the process (their engagement in developing family literacy practices and their confidence in their own ability to support their children’s literacy development) the context (research carried out with parents in a DEIS school community) and the time (families with children in Early Start and junior infant engaging in a four week family literacy programme in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic). Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT model is considered throughout the presentation of this analysis of the PEG in this chapter (and in the analysis of the findings from the pre and post-workshop interviews in chapter 5).

Table 1

Summary of Research Questions, AR stage, Research Tool and Participants

Research Question	AR stage	Research Tool	Participants
According to parents from an area of disadvantage, what are the pre-existing family literacy practices carried out in their homes, and why are they motivated to engage in these practices with their children?	Planning Evaluation Reflection	-Focus group -Pre and post workshop semi-structured interviews	Parent Expert Group (PEG) consisting of six first class parents Eight Early Start and junior infant parents Fourteen Early Start and junior infant parents
What are the barriers and enablers to engaging in family literacy practices and	Planning	-Focus group	Parent Expert Group (PEG) consisting of six

programmes for the families who partook in this research?	Evaluation Reflection	-Pre and post-workshop semi-structured interview	first class parents Eight Early Start and junior infant parents Fourteen Early Start and junior infant parents
What outcomes are identified by parents who engaged in these co-designed tailored family literacy workshops?	Evaluation Reflection	-Post-workshop semi-structured interviews -Field notes	Fourteen Early Start and junior infant parents

4.1.1 Participants

As outlined previously, this qualitative research is based in the context of the DEIS primary school where I work as HSCL and is not intended to be representative of practices in other DEIS schools; therefore, the number of participants was relatively small scale (see sections 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 for details on participants at various stages of this AR study).

When considering the representativeness of the participant group, the homogeneity and the heterogeneity of the population were considered, taking aspects such as gender, SES, nationality and first language into account. All participants were parents/ guardians of children aged 3-6 in this English-speaking DEIS school in an area of economic and social disadvantage; however, gender, age, family size, nationality, and first language, as well as other features, varied amongst the participants. The parents in the PEG aimed to be representative of the school as a whole and acted as experts in the area who participated in the co-designing of the workshop activities. The group's diversity reflects the diverse makeup of the school community as a whole, which consists of children who speak twenty-nine different languages (see section 1.2 for more detailed description of the research context).

The access to the participant group was relatively straightforward in this research as I work in the school as HSCL and was previously known to all the

participants. The school's Board of Management granted consent for the research to be carried out in the school in October 2021. I aimed to make participation in the research as straightforward as possible for the participants to encourage participation (e.g., time, location, child minding facilities). It was considered that participation may have been denied by the participants themselves for reasons such as prior commitments, lack of time or lack of interest in the area. As outlined by Conaty (2002), it is possible that some of the non-attenders may have felt 'marginalised' (although every effort was made to ensure that was not the case) and may have denied participation for that reason. A lack of educational capital may have inhibited some parents from engaging in the research, while the possession of educational capital may have encouraged other parents to engage. The idea of the non-participant was an essential factor to consider when planning and evaluating the research and the non-participation of other parents could be deemed a limitation to this research (see section 3.11).

The sampling strategy chosen for this research was a non-probability sample, as the target group were parents of Early Start, junior infant and first class children in this DEIS school in the chosen timeframe. Convenience sampling was deemed most appropriate for this research as I had daily access to and contact with this particular group of parents. In addition to this, according to Cohen et al. (2007), convenience sampling does not aim to generalise for a broader population, which was also relevant to this study.

Table 2

Summary of Participant Groups and Timeline

Group	Participant group	Target audience (number of people invited to participate)	Timeline
PEG	Six parents	Forty parents of children in first class (mainstream classes and special class for children with ASD)	November 2021
Pre-workshop interview participants	Eight parents	Twenty-eight parents who agreed to participate in the workshops	May 2022

Post-workshop interview participants	Fourteen parents (six of whom participated in the pre-workshop interviews)	Twenty-eight parents who participated in the workshops	June 2022
Workshop attendees	Twenty-eight parents	Sixty parents of children in Early Start and junior infants	May 2022

4.2 Planning

This section outlines the 'planning' stage of this action research cycle. It begins with a brief overview of this phase of the study. The idea of the PEG is outlined in section 4.2.1, whereby the PEG as a focus group is discussed, namely the development, piloting and implementation of the focus group schedule. A brief outline of the participants who engaged in the PEG is given in section 4.2.1.3. The findings from the PEG focus group are then outlined thematically, exploring family literacy, person characteristics, home-school relationships, barriers to engagement and the development of family literacy practices. Section 4.2.1.3 looks at advice from the PEG for implementing the parent workshops. The final section of the 'planning' phase of this action research (section 4.2.2) outlines the pre-existing literature and guidelines used to aid the formation of this set of family literacy workshops.

The first phase of this AR study, the 'planning', began in September 2021 when all parents of children in first class (in both the mainstream and the ASD classes) were invited to participate in the Parent Expert Group to co-develop a set of family literacy workshops for the parents of children in the younger classes in the school. Six out of forty parents agreed to participate in the recorded PEG focus group. In November 2021, I met the PEG, which consisted of five mothers and one father of children in first class (see section 4.2.1.3 for participant profiles). Guided by a focus group schedule (see Appendix E), which was designed and piloted with another parent, the participants reflected on their own family literacy practices, experiences of their children's language and literacy development and home-school relationships. This focus group allowed discussion on what works well for these parents and what supports they may have needed (or may perhaps still need) to best support their children's language

and literacy development. We then spoke about the action we would take, designing a workshop schedule for the parents of children in Early Start and junior infants based on the PEG's pre-existing family literacy practices, their experiences and what they thought might be useful for these parents to know at their children's current stage of emergent literacy development. I transcribed the focus group recording, evaluated this discussion and analysed it using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process for thematic analysis. All members of the PEG were invited to review the transcript, with two members of the PEG engaging in this process. Literature and guidelines on the development of family literacy programmes, focusing on the Irish context, were then considered (see section 4.2.2). The workshop schedule was derived for the family literacy workshops, incorporating key ideas that parents in the PEG identified as important, as well as literature and guidelines on family literacy. The schedule was given to the PEG parents for evaluation, and considering the suggested changes, the workshop schedule was finalised. The following sections will outline the above stage in further detail.

4.2.1 PEG- The Focus Group

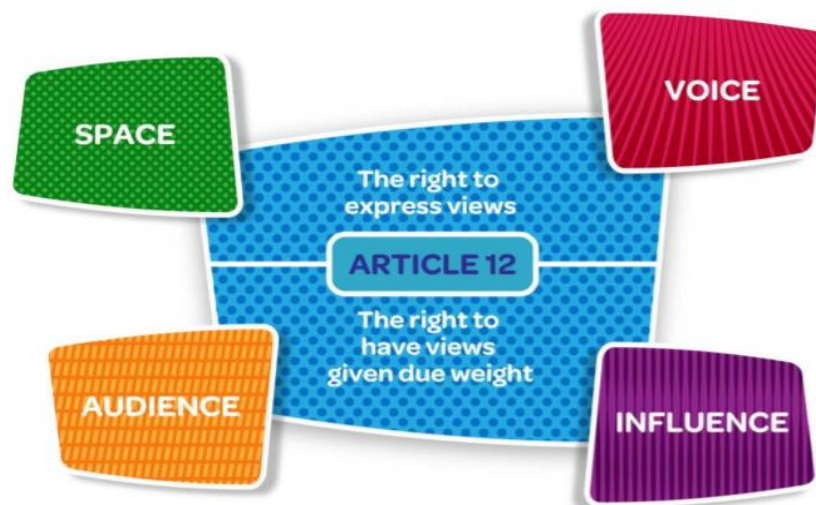
The focus group for this research was developmental in nature and consisted of the parents involved in the PEG sharing their ideas about content to be included in the parent workshops for their peers. The focus group was chosen as the appropriate research method for this 'planning' stage of the action research cycle for a number of reasons. Firstly, they allow genuine engagement from participants in a group setting where the shared construction of ideas is prioritised. This research was carried out under the research paradigm of critical theory, which is collaborative and outlines that research participants should be involved in identifying issues in their own situations and exploring actions to lead to enhancement, both offered in a well-run focus group. In addition to this, the idea of the shared voice and collective viewpoint is relevant to this research, as the parents in the focus group were given the opportunity to co-develop ideas around content for the workshops and shared experiences around family literacy practices.

The use of focus groups in this research allowed parents who may have language and literacy issues to engage, more so than the use of a questionnaire. The varied experiences and ideas of these parents, who come from varying backgrounds and nationalities and speak varying languages, allowed for the individual and the collective voice of these parents to be prioritised in this research. This action research was participatory in nature and prioritised the democratic and practical engagement of participants, ensuring respect for the participants' knowledge, experiences, and thoughts, two of the aims of this focus group. The focus group aimed to distinguish what factors the parents who participated felt were most useful for other parents to learn while also establishing a baseline for family literacy practices in the homes of these parents (while considering that this may not be an accurate reflection of pre-existing practices in all households). My role, as the role of the researcher in the focus group was considered, as was the organisation of the group (including the heterogeneity and homogeneity of participants), the inclusion of potential use of stimulus materials and the recording of the group sessions.

As outlined in section 3.7.1, the focus group for the PEG was based on an adapted version of the child's right to participation as outlined in Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child outlined in Lundy (2007) (see Figure 4). This adapted version aimed to prioritise the voice of the parents from an area of low-SES who participated in the Parent Expert Group. The importance of providing the physical 'space' in which the PEG took place (the school's parent's room) and also providing an inclusive and comfortable environment was considered. This 'planning' stage of the AR ensured that the participants were given an opportunity to express their 'voice', views and expertise about pre-existing family literacy practices, home-school relationships and recommendations for the family literacy workshop design. The importance of genuinely listening to these suggestions and using them to design and facilitate the workshops was prioritised ('audience'), as was the 'influence' these views had and the importance of acting on them.

Figure 4

Lundy's Model of Participation (2007)



4.2.1.1 Development of Focus Group Design

Appropriate language and vocabulary were used when composing the focus group questions to avoid bias or ambiguity. The wording of the questions was considered. The Plain English Guidelines (NALA, 2010) were adhered to, to ensure that the questions and the layout of the focus group were as direct and clear as possible for the PEG participants. The importance of the sequence of the questions was also considered. The questions for the focus group schedule were derived from analysis of the relevant literature in the area and were based on the research questions (see Appendix E). The focus group questions were also based on Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2006) PPCT model and included questions which explored each element of this model, the proximal process of developing family literacy practices, 'person' characteristics that both affect and are affected by the proximal processes, 'context' and contextual barriers and 'time'. Questions based on pre-existing family literacy practices, home-school relationships and parent confidence were included. The questions allowed participants to reflect on their experiences of the topics at hand, and encouraged parents to add advice for other parents who would participate in the workshops. Opening, introductory, transition, key, and ending questions were used throughout the focus group process. The questions were sequenced so that they began as general and moved towards more specific ones. A final question asked the participants if there was anything that was missed or if they had anything more to contribute.

Practical issues such as an appropriate time and setting for the workshops were discussed, as well as any elements that may encourage maximum engagement from parents of children in the Early Start and junior infant classes in the workshops. All questions in the focus group schedule were deemed relevant and addressed the original research questions (see Appendix E). The focus group schedule was edited numerous times based on advice from supervisors, module coordinators and piloting (see below).

4.2.1.2 Focus Group Piloting and Implementation

Before carrying out the focus groups, two parents in the school, one with English as an additional language (as is reflective of the school community), were approached to review the focus group schedule. Both parents were met individually in the school at a suitable time. I read the questions and asked the volunteers for any valuable feedback on the structure of the questions, the vocabulary, and the question content. They were both asked to advise on where to hold the focus groups and when they deemed it suitable for parents to participate. The parent with English as an additional language was encouraged to advise on how best to engage other parents from her culture (one of the dominant cultures in the school) and to indicate any cultural barriers that may inhibit parents from engaging in this focus group. Both parents were asked to outline any practical issues they foresaw in running the workshops. All feedback from the piloting process was considered when planning and implementing the focus group.

Following the focus group piloting exercise, I distributed information sheets to all parents of children in the two first classes in the school. Six parents responded and agreed to partake in the focus group session as part of the Parent Expert Group (PEG). The focus group occurred in the school parent's room at 9 a.m. on a school morning in November 2021. This was scheduled in advance based on the time and location suggestions of the participants. Six parents attended the focus group session.

I facilitated, recorded, and transcribed the focus group sessions. The participants were put at ease beforehand, and the process of the focus group was explained to them (this information had also been previously given to them

orally to ensure the inclusion and facilitation of non-literate parents and those who speak English as an additional language, and in the detailed information sheet outlining all details to the parents (see Appendix C and D)), leaving an opportunity for any questions they should have. I outlined that the questions would be used as a guide for conversation on the research topic. The idea of developing a parent workshop was also explained again to the participants. It was emphasised to the participants that there were no right or wrong answers and that honesty would be appreciated in answering all questions. It was also outlined to the participants that if the conversation veered off-topic, I would draw the attention back to the topic that was being researched. During the focus group, I strived to ensure that no bias or personal values of mine were manifest and assumed a neutral position. I aimed to establish and maintain a good rapport with the participants during the interviews. Careful management of the encounter and the responses given during the interview were also considered. The participants' cultural, social, and linguistic norms were all considered and respected throughout the process. Clarity of questioning and mindfulness of language used was ensured whereby terms such as 'family literacy' and 'home-school relationships' were discussed informally (amongst the participants and with me) to ensure common understanding. It was explained to all participants that they had a right to withdraw at any time from the research. Two participants in the focus group had to leave the discussion slightly early due to other commitments. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed with all data collected. Upon completion of the focus group, the recording and transcription were stored as per ethical approval received for the research.

4.2.1.3 PEG Participants Profiles

The participants of the PEG consisted of parents of the children in first class in this urban DEIS band 1 vertical primary school. As outlined when considering sampling in chapter 3, there were two first classes in the school at the time, with 35 children in total, as well as a special class designated for children with ASD, with 5 children in first class. As outlined, an information sheet was distributed to all first class children for their parents/ guardians, with six parents agreeing to

partake in the PEG focus group. Table 3 outlines the characteristics of the participants of the PEG.

Table 3

PEG Participant Profiles

Parent pseudonym	Parent gender	Parent nationality	Parent first language	No of children	Children's class in school	Children's nationality	Children's first language
Lacey	Female	Irish	English	2	First class and Early Start	Irish	English
Clare	Female	Irish	English	2	First class and finished school	Irish	English
Leanne	Female	Irish	English	1	First class in ASD Class	Irish	English
Johan	Male	South African	English	1	First class	Irish	English
Alina	Female	Nepalese	Nepali	2	First class and junior infants	Nepalese	English
Asyah	Female	Libyan	Arabic	3	First class, senior infants and Early Start	Irish	Arabic

4.2.1.4 PEG Findings

The Parent Expert Group focus group discussion took place in November 2021 and primarily focused on research questions 1 and 2 (see section 4.1). The focus group centred around a discussion on family literacy, home-school relationships and advice for parents in the school, using a pre-written focus group schedule (see Appendix E). The data collected outlines the pre-existing family literacy practices of the parents who participated in the PEG and also aims to establish any barriers which exist for these parents in this context when engaging in family literacy practices or supporting their child's development. The PEG explores how these parents describe the home-school relationships in this setting and outlines ideas around the design and the implementation of a series of family literacy workshops for parents of children in Early Start and junior infants, in terms of content, practicalities and characteristics with the vision of developing workshops to support family literacy practices in the homes of these families, the proximal process that was prioritised for this research.

The PEG focus group has been analysed thematically, considering Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model. Emerging themes are outlined in this section in the following order:

- Family literacy practices
- 'Person' factors
- Home/ school links and relationships
- Contextual barriers
- Advice for the implementation of the parent workshops

4.2.1.4.1 Family Literacy Practices

The PEG discussed the various activities and ideas they implement in their child's microsystems to engage them in formal and informal learning. Various ideas around developing the child's oral language and literacy skills both in the home and outside were outlined by parents, with Lacey outlining that "reading does not have to be just sitting down with a book". This section will delve into the pre-existing family literacy practices that the PEG outlined. The ideas discussed in the following section formed the base for the content to be included in the series of family literacy workshops.

4.2.1.4.1.1 Language and Literacy Development in the Environment

Parents outlined opportunities for language and literacy development in the child's environment. All parents spoke about opportunities for engaging in informal games when out for walks in the community, including reading signposts, shop names and advertisements in locations such as the park, the grocery shop, the shopping centre, the train station, and the airport. Games such as scavenger hunts were also discussed, with the example of a hunt for various items in the park outlined by Leanne. Visits to the museums in the locality and the local library were also mentioned as ways to work on developing skills, with Clare suggesting that the school should facilitate parents to join the local library and visit local museums.

4.2.1.4.1.2 Language and Literacy Development “in the Kitchen”

Clare and Alina outlined a number of ways that they engage their children in informal family literacy practices when shopping for food and cooking. Clare further described how she encourages vocabulary development when in the shop by naming unknown items such as fruits and vegetables. She explained how she asks her child to use her free writing skills to write the shopping list and then gives her a small trolley to go and find the items, which she believes promotes literacy and language skills, as well as independence. Alina does similar activities and also puts her eldest child in charge of the spending when shopping to develop numeracy skills.

Clare described how when baking and cooking at home, she asks her child to read the recipes where possible and to find and weigh the correct amounts of ingredients, stating, "Yeah. And it is fun as well. And she does not even realise that she is doing her reading". She explained that she encourages her child to follow a method or procedure when baking/ cooking also to work on organisational skills.

4.2.1.4.1.3 Games and Activities that Support Language and Literacy Development

All parents in the PEG described the informal games they play with their children to develop their language and literacy skills, ranging from games their children have created themselves to I-Spy. Allowing the child to act as the teacher was a game suggested by Alina as she feels that this opportunity allows for vocabulary development and is a practical family learning activity for the whole family to engage in. Leanne mentioned the use of “shop-bought resources” which she uses for both formal and informal learning with her child with ASD who loves visuals. Yasmin, Alina and Leanne mentioned using educational content on YouTube, including storybook reading and educational songs, which they believe develop vocabulary. Providing resources for children to engage in independent development was outlined by Clare and Asyah, who promote free writing opportunities for their children.

4.2.1.4.1.4 Reading Experiences in the Home

Reading and literacy-based activities were a central focus of this discussion, with parents clearly outlining what reading experiences look like in their homes. All parents stated that they focus on their child's interests when choosing/ helping their child to choose books. Some parents mentioned encouraging their children to watch TV series and movies based on the books they read to encourage comprehension. Lacey outlined the following,

"We pick a book that has a YouTube video with it. So, like we spent the week like before it reading the story in bed. We'd say pick "Elf on the Shelf", or we pick "Eddie, Where's my Teddy?". And then on the Friday, they'd have a movie night, and I'd have "Eddie, Where's my Teddy?" on YouTube. And even if it was someone reading it back to them or something like that so that at the end of the week, they can say right well I finished this book".

The idea of encouraging their children to read a series of books was outlined by Lacey, who suggested that by reading a series a child feels a sense of achievement and has a "goal" to finish them. Clare spoke about choosing aesthetically pleasing books with "loads of illustrations to catch their attention" or books with buttons to press to engage younger children. The idea of having a "good choice" of books in the home was discussed, particularly books on topics the child is interested in.

When describing a typical reading experience in the home, parents discussed the best times, locations, and strategies for helping their children. Most participants agreed that night-time before bed was a good opportunity for reading and family literacy practices. Leanne outlined that her child, who has ASD, likes to read after the shower as he is usually calm at this time. Alina noted that although she usually schedules reading for night-time, sometimes her children ask her to read a book randomly, and she tries to accommodate them as best she can. Lacey acknowledged that her child can be tired in the evening after a day of school, homework club and after-school activities, so she tries to focus on reading more at the weekends and during school holidays. When discussing the location of the reading sessions at home, most agreed that the child's bedroom is

best, except Lacey, who prefers the sitting room sofa as she feels the children are more engaged and awake.

The participants suggested a number of strategies for assisting their children with their reading. Lacey, Clare and Leanne discussed that they encourage their children to blend and segment words based on their knowledge of phonics or sometimes based on syllables, with Clare expressing that she thinks “the sounds are brilliant. If it's a big word you can even cover half of it with your finger. And say, do the first you know and then it comes to her and then she puts it together”. Alina uses repetition to reinforce words orally for her children and often displays cards of new words around the house to encourage them to recognise the words.

4.2.1.4.1.5 The Importance of Literacy and Language Development

The importance of education and learning as a whole was discussed, with a particular focus being placed on the importance of literacy. Leanne outlined that she “would prioritise the reading because I think they’re going to need that in everyday life”. The prioritisation of literacy was also discussed by Clare, who outlined that she sets aside time to engage in family literacy activities with her children “no matter what’s going on in the house”. In relation to language development, Lacey outlined that she emphasises “any kind of language like spoken word, written word or like reading or anything like that, because that's kind of the basics for everything...I think it is kind of the grounding for everything else- speech, reading and writing”. A respect for education, teachers and books was expressed by Johan, who explained that in his culture, teachers are highly respected, and you learn to “cherish books”, something he has passed on to his child.

4.2.1.4.1.6 Emergent Literacy and Language

The PEG mentioned the idea of early literacy development, with Clare outlining that she sees importance in “catching them (the children) when they are young”. This led us to engage in a conversation about early literacy. Leanne suggested that the workshops for the parents of children in Early Start and junior infants should “start off with the basics” of emergent literacy to support these parents

and their children. Similarly, Clare mentioned that developing strong literacy skills at a young age was “the best foundation” for children, with Johan outlining that “if you set the tone early on, learning doesn’t necessarily have to be painful”. In conclusion, the PEG discussed the various activities and ideas they implement in their child’s microsystems to engage them in formal and informal learning. Various ideas around developing the child’s oral language and literacy skills both in the home and outside were outlined by parents, as was the importance of language and literacy development in the emergent stages of development.

4.2.1.4.2 ‘Person’ Characteristics

As outlined in previous sections, the developed and developing characteristics of the ‘person’ affect the success of the proximal process (which, in the case of this research, is the development of family literacy practices). These dispositions, resource, and demand characteristics can work synergistically with the ‘context’ and ‘time’ elements of the PPCT model to help or hinder the development of the individual. Some of the ‘person’ characteristics outlined by the PEG are outlined in this section including parent confidence, parent engagement and interest in education and parenting practices.

The idea of parent competence and confidence emerged within the PEG discussion. Johan spoke about the difficulties that parents with EAL have in relation to their confidence in supporting their child’s learning (to put this in context, Johan speaks English fluently but has close friends who do not and is speaking anecdotally based on what he has heard from them). He acknowledged that he feels “very confident and competent around the language”, which enables him to feel confident around supporting his child’s learning, but that this may not be the case for all parents, something he feels should be considered in the designing of these family literacy workshops. Other parents noted that they feel relatively confident in supporting their children’s development, but their confidence may have increased had they been offered an opportunity such as these workshops when their children were in Early Start or junior infants.

The six participating parents expressed varying types of engagement in their child’s learning. They outlined many ideas for engagement in a number of different literacy and language games as well as family literacy activities, which

they prioritise (as outlined in 4.2.2.1). Leanne spoke about her engagement in education and outlined that she is currently undertaking professional development and has an interest in adult education. Asyah outlined how she would like to be more involved in her child's education and suggested that engaging in a school-run parent class like the family literacy workshops may help her to do so. Johan outlined that he was more engaged in his child's learning when he was younger, but now his child is more independent; he feels that not as much parental input is needed. All parents spoke about how they understand that it is not only the job of the teacher to educate their children and that children need to learn outside the "school-based setting", in line with Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem.

Parenting practices were alluded to by parents. The idea of encouragement was spoken about in the PEG sessions, whereby parents outlined that "positive reinforcement for your child" is essential. Lacey, who made this comment, outlined that she encourages her children to read and makes a "huge deal" out of the most minor achievement. Leanne spoke about using reward systems to encourage her child to engage in learning activities, which she believes is a beneficial way to motivate him for short periods of time. All parents outlined that they use their child's interests as encouragement to engage in formal and informal activities.

The idea of not pressuring children to engage in activities and knowing when "your child is fed up" was discussed by Clare, who said that she learned from parenting her older child that pressuring children to engage in activities is not beneficial; instead, parents should leave it if it is not working, go for a walk and attempt to continue the activity informally, "you're still doing the activity, but the kids don't realise". She also touched on the idea of parents not putting pressure on themselves and advised "don't bog yourself down and worry about it". Routine and consistency were identified as important factors in the PEG group. Leanne outlined that "consistency is key" when engaging children in learning activities, with Clare stating that "kids love routine". In conclusion, some of the 'person' characteristics which the PEG deemed as important are outlined in this section including parent confidence, parent engagement, parent interest in education and parenting practices.

4.2.1.4.3 Home-School Relationships

The importance of strong home-school relationships in the mesosystem was discussed numerous times during the PEG, with all parents agreeing that they prefer to be on "the same page" as the school. Lacey outlined the importance of the home-school bond, stating, "I think it's just important to have like a strong like family and school link, like a home-school link, and to make that a really strong bond". The relationship between the teacher and the parents of the children in the class was discussed, whereby the parents acknowledged the importance of this relationship to best support the child's development and learning. Lacey also discussed an idea she called "familiarisation", where she highlighted the importance of the parent and the school being familiar with what is going on at school and home where appropriate. All parents identified this contextual element of strong home-school relationships and links as an essential factor in relation to their child's learning and development. Parents acknowledged that by having this strong link between the home and the school, parents may be more likely to engage in this set of family literacy workshops.

4.2.1.4.3.1 Suggestions for Strengthening Home-School Relationships

The idea of the teacher having "more knowledge" was outlined by Lacey and Clare, who acknowledged that they appreciate tips from teachers who "know how they (children) learn and what they think". All parents agreed that "communication both ways" is vital for strong home-school relationships to exist. A number of parents alluded to the idea that home-school relationships tend to weaken as the children get older. Asyah and Lacey, who have children in the Early Start class in the school presently, outlined that they feel that the home-school relationships with the Early Start class and teacher are stronger than those with the first class teacher.

At the start of the year, in both Early Start and junior infants, the school organises an information meeting between the parents and school staff whereby the content for the upcoming year is outlined. Johan also suggested that this may be a good idea for the older classes, stating, "there should be almost a debriefing for the parents to explain what's going to be happening". He further suggested that perhaps the teachers could suggest how best to support the children's

learning in the areas they are covering, encourage family learning relevant to the work being covered in school, and ensure optimal benefits come from family learning opportunities. He outlined,

“I think if you gave the parents an opportunity to play a game with the kids, that might be more entertaining and more practical for kids to learn rather than giving the parents, you know, here's a stack of the notes that are going to be covered for the next term”.

Lacey and Clare suggested that perhaps the first class teachers could share more ideas with the parents using the class communication app- Class Dojo. Lacey suggested that the teacher could ask parents for ideas based on the topic being covered that week and allow parents to "just comment on things and say like, start a conversation on Dojo between the parents" (in line with the nature of this research whereby the parents are active participants). She outlined that these ideas could be collected and shared with other parents through the school notice boards or social media.

Clare outlined that when the children were in the infant classes, the parents received pictures of them on Class Dojo and used these pictures as talking points with their children to recall what happened during their school day. She suggested that the first class teachers send the parents some pictures to allow them to converse with their children, "'oh, I know what you did today, I seen the pictures', and you'd chat about the day then". Evidently, parents see the importance of the development of strong home-school links and prioritise this.

4.2.1.4.4 Barriers

The PEG discussion explored barriers parents may face in supporting their child's development, both barriers that these parents face themselves and other barriers that they envisage parents of Early Start and junior infant children may face. The barriers mentioned have been organised into the following subheadings and take the PPCT elements of 'person', 'context' and 'time' into account:

- Barriers that parents face
- Barriers that children face

- Contextual and time barriers

4.2.1.4.4.1 Parent Barriers

The participants outlined several barriers they face in relation to supporting their child's language and literacy development, including time, motivation, knowledge and competence and language.

Parent motivation, a disposition, was mentioned by three parents. Lacey argued that there are "parents that don't have any interest" while further expressing that "not everyone wants to sit down at a table with their kids" for varying reasons. Clare outlined how some parents feel as if it is the teacher's job solely to educate their child, stating, "there is some parents out there would say, 'Oh, that's the teacher's job, yeah, you know, that's their job, they have to do that'". Johan spoke about his own motivations and outlined how he reads a lot for his job; therefore, he lacks motivation to read by himself or to his child outside of work hours (he explained that his child is also more than happy to read by himself with no parental input, so he does not feel as if the child is missing out).

Parent knowledge, a resource characteristic, was outlined by all PEG participants as a barrier to supporting their child's language and literacy development. As outlined above, the child in first class is the oldest child of five of the six participating parents, so this is their first time experiencing the primary school system as a parent. Asyah, Clare and Johan explained that they are often confused about their child's homework and feel as if they need clearer instructions on how best to support their child (see also section 4.2.1.4.3 on home-school relationships), with Asyah outlining "I can't teach my daughter this topic because I didn't take it before". Leanne described that the style of teaching and learning has changed since she was in school and that there are now "different techniques we wouldn't have heard of", in particular in relation to phonics teaching. Johan mentioned "generational barriers" as an issue for some parents, while Alina spoke about how she faces difficulties as she is from a "different background" to others.

Difficulties with the Irish language were highlighted by all of the six parents, who expressed that they find it challenging to support their children's Irish language learning as they do not speak Irish themselves. More relevant to

this set of family literacy workshops, a barrier that was alluded to by all participants in the PEG was English as an additional language. The two parents who speak English as their second language, Alina and Asyah, spoke about their difficulties with vocabulary and grammar and the issues that this causes when supporting their children, including comprehension. Johan, who speaks English as his own first language but has a friend with a child in the class who struggles with English, asked, "how do you communicate and how do you teach your kid in English if you don't understand English in the first place?". He spoke about how this parent often reaches out to him and seeks help and advice regarding her child's schooling and development. Evidently, parents themselves face barriers when supporting their children's language and literacy development.

4.2.1.4.4.2 Child Barriers

Three parents outlined difficulties they encounter with their children, challenging their ability to support their child's learning. Leanne, whose child is in the ASD class in the school and diagnosed with ASD, outlined that their family literacy practices are often very dependent on the "day that they (the child) had in school". She outlined that there are days that she finds it very difficult to motivate her child to engage in any formal or informal learning, with other parents agreeing with this. Clare highlighted that her child gets "fed up easily" and that she needs something very engaging to keep her concentration. Lacey, Clare and Leanne outlined that their children are busy after school with varying after-school clubs and extra-curricular activities; therefore, they are often tired and not interested in engaging in formal or informal literacy or language activities. In summary, child barriers can inhibit engagement in language and literacy activities in the homes of these families.

4.2.1.4.4.3 Contextual and Time Barriers

The PEG outlined a number of barriers based on the context and time in which they and other parents are currently living. COVID-19, an element related to macrotime, was highlighted as a barrier by all participants in relation to engaging in family literacy practices, developing literacy skills, and building home-school relationships. This focus group was carried out in November 2021. Due to

COVID-19, schools had been closed from March to September 2020 and from January to March 2021, not long before this research took place. Some mentioned that they could not bring their children on educational trips due to closures, while Asyah outlined that she had registered for an adult education course, which was cancelled due to COVID. All participants agreed that home-school relationships have been affected by COVID-19 and that they do not feel as if they are as familiar with the school as they would have been pre-COVID due to restrictions in place in the school. Lacey outlined that there was a variation in teacher engagement and that her child's current class teacher was slightly less approachable than previous teachers, causing a barrier to home-school relationships.

Other barriers mentioned were seasonal barriers, with Clare outlining that she is much less inclined to go on trips or engage in family literacy when the evenings are dark or the weather could be better. Lacey mentioned that she was getting her house tiled, and due to the disruption, she had found it difficult to make time for family literacy practices during the three weeks before the PEG discussion. The school's after-school homework club was seen as a great facility for both the parents and the children but was highlighted by Johan as a barrier to family learning in a way, as the child has already had a long day and his homework is completed by the time he gets home, so a focus on further literacy or language activities is not prioritised. Johan alluded to SES as a barrier, highlighting that due to the fact that the school is in an area of disadvantage, some parents may not "have the funds to purchase those books or take them (their children) to the library".

Time was a noteworthy barrier that was mentioned by all parents, including elements of micro, meso and macrotime. Some outlined that finding the time to engage in regular family literacy practices was hindered by work commitments, with Leanne explaining that both she and her partner are currently working while she is also preparing for interviews for a promotion in her workplace. Clare pointed out that she sometimes finds it challenging to make time for her own commitments as well as her child's and revealed that she "gets caught up in (her) own thing". The issue of library opening hours during the week was outlined by Lacey, who suggested that by the time she collects her child from the homework club, makes dinner and takes her child to extracurricular activities,

the library is closed. In conclusion, varying barriers are outlined by all parents and can inhibit engagement in language and literacy development in the home.

4.2.1.4.5 Advice for the Implementation of Parent Workshops

Throughout the focus group discussion, participants were reminded to consider the workshops that would be created for the parents of Early Start and junior infant children. Parents were reminded that the content, advice and expertise shared in this focus group would be used to form the family literacy workshop programme for parents and children in the Early Start and junior infant classes. The PEG were asked about practical considerations and ideas for content that could be included in the workshop schedule. All participants outlined the importance of laying the “best foundation” for learning when the children are in the early years of language and literacy development, highlighting the importance of running these workshops with children and families in the younger classes in the school. Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT model places importance on the time aspect of development and on developing proximal processes in the early stages of development, and according to these parents, it is critical to “catch them (the children) when they’re young”.

4.2.1.4.5.1 Content for the Workshops

The PEG gave insight into their family literacy practices, as outlined in the previous sections, and their thoughts on how best to support their children, as well as outlining some specific ideas that they would like to be included in the workshops. A number of participants spoke about sharing ideas with parents about how best to introduce informal literacy and language development in everyday activities. They highlighted their own practices and how these may help (as outlined in earlier sections) and also explicitly put forward ideas about what they thought parents of children this age might need or want to know.

The idea of making learning fun featured heavily in the suggestions from the PEG. All participants agreed that exploring regular stimulating informal activities incorporating the child’s interests and their immediate environment (in line with Bronfenbrenner’s theory regarding the proximal processes in the microsystem and the context element of the PPCT) would benefit parents of Early

Start and junior infants. Johan suggested that not all parents are interested or perhaps able to sit at the table and do homework; therefore, the workshops should give "parents the opportunity to play a game with the kids that might be more entertaining and more practical". He suggested that the workshops should allow parents to learn some games that include everyday words that the children see in their environments, such as "the few things that everyone has in the household, like ingredients in the pantry and cans and stuff like that". The idea of "how to make reading fun" was suggested by Lacey, who highlighted the importance of knowing your child's interests and basing your learning opportunities around them.

Ideas for family literacy activities, as outlined by members of the PEG earlier in this chapter, include learning in the environment while out and about (reading signposts, shop names, food packages, and advertisements), literacy scavenger hunts, literacy focuses when cooking and baking, following procedures, games such as I-Spy, using visuals, watching educational content on YouTube, reading books together, free writing opportunities and visits to the library. All the ideas outlined were incorporated into the family literacy workshops for Early Start and junior infant children and parents. Other factors which contributed to the workshops' development included relevant literature and family literacy guidelines, as outlined in section 4.2.2.

Practical considerations such as the issues of time and location of the workshops were discussed by the PEG, with some varying suggestions emerging. In relation to time, Clare outlined that for parents who are not working, the morning time, just after the children are dropped off at school, would be most suitable as there may be fewer issues with childminding. The PEG suggested that the idea of the children attending the workshops would also eliminate childminding issues and that younger siblings should have the opportunity to attend if necessary. Parents suggested that participants could practise their new skills by inviting the children to attend, with potential benefits for both parents and children. The PEG also suggested that younger siblings should be allowed to attend to alleviate any child minding issues for parents and to ensure optimal engagement of parents. Clare considered those working and suggested that the morning times may be unsuitable for parents whose working hours begin early; however, if ample notice was given, parents could move around their work

schedules where possible. Lacey suggested that parents who participate in the workshops should be approached and asked to put forward their preferences for time. She suggested that if there is interest in both morning and afternoon times, the workshop could be run twice a week at both times or every second week at alternating times. Johan, who works from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day, suggested that some content could be posted online to accommodate parents who cannot physically attend school due to work commitments. In relation to the location of the workshops, all parents agreed that the school and the local community was the most suitable location due to the fact that most people live close by and would be dropping and collecting their children, with Clare outlining, "well, the way it is, everyone has to come to the school anyway". In summary, all parents suggested practical ways in which parents could optimally engage in these PEG designed workshops. As is evidenced in later chapters, these suggestions proved to be crucial to the success of this research.

4.2.1.4.6 Conclusion

Six parents who had children in first class in this urban DEIS band 1 primary school participated in the Parent Expert Group in November 2021. This group discussed their pre-existing family literacy practices, activities they do in the home and local environment with their children, their experiences of promoting their children's language and literacy development, their relationship with the school and ideas that they felt would be beneficial for parents of children in the Early Start and junior infant classes in the school. This data was analysed thematically, and the suggestions from this focus group were used (in collaboration with NALA's (2020) guidelines for successful family literacy programmes, see section 4.2.2) as design principles to develop a set of family literacy workshops specific to the needs of this school community, as identified by parents within the community itself. The workshop schedule was designed and approved by the members of the PEG. Although not collected as data for this research, it should be acknowledged that the parents who participated in the PEG are now active members of the school community, with four of the six members of the PEG now sitting on the school's newly re-established Parents

Association, while playing an active role in decision making and encouraging partnerships between the school staff and the parent community.

This series of family literacy workshops ran over four weeks in May 2022, with the parents of children in Early Start and junior infants in the school invited to attend. Twenty- eight families engaged in the four-week programme. All parents who attended the workshops were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview pre and post-workshops. The findings from the semi-structured interviews pre and post-workshop, which are elements of the 'reflection' and 'evaluation' phases of this PAR, are outlined in chapter 5.

4.2.2 Family Literacy Workshop Design

This section sets out the design principles for the family literacy workshops, which derive from the following:

- 1) findings of the PEG focus group analysis (see section 4.2.1.3),
- 2) guidelines for effective practice (NALA, 2020),
- 3) other relevant literature in the area.

As outlined, one document was particularly relevant to designing this set of family literacy workshops: the guidelines for family literacy practices in Ireland published by NALA (2020) titled *Enabling Intergenerational Learning: Background Report on Family Literacy and Practices in Irish Education and Training Boards*. These guidelines, which were published on behalf of the Educational and Training Boards in Ireland and SOLAS (the state agency that oversees the Further Educational and Training sector in Ireland), are rooted in data collected from staff, participants and other key stakeholders in the area of family literacy in Ireland. These guidelines consider best practices for organising family literacy programmes to achieve the most optimal outcomes for participants. Table 4 outlines the family literacy guidelines (NALA, 2020) which were influential in the planning and implementation of the family literacy programme, detailing the empirical steps taken to put these guidelines into practice.

Table 4*Family Literacy Guidelines in Practice*

Guideline	In Practice
A learner-centred ethos that values the parents who participate is prioritised, ensuring their experience is valued and the content is relevant to their lives.	- The PEG offered participants an opportunity to share their knowledge and expertise in the area of family literacy with the focus of creating a tailored family literacy programme for fellow parents in the school. - This relevant knowledge and expertise were analysed and formed the basis for the family literacy programme for the parents of Early Start and junior infant parents. - The PEG worked to actively create knowledge for this workshop programme, ensuring that the programme would not be generic but instead tailored to the needs of the school community as was identified by the PEG.
Family literacy programmes should focus on the importance of learning relationships.	- Relationships were prioritised throughout this research, beginning with the formation of the PEG, and the importance of creating a comfortable environment and strong relationships for the participants to feel comfortable to participate was deemed important (parents were put at ease throughout the process and were offered an opportunity to chat at the start and end of the focus group over a cup of tea). - This research focussed on home-school relationships by gaining parent's thoughts on these relationships and the communication between the elements of the mesosystems in all stages of this AR cycle (see chapter 5).
Family literacy opportunities should prioritise the learner's greatest needs.	- By collaborating with the PEG and basing the workshops on their thoughts, this family literacy programme was based on the greatest needs outlined by parents from the same socio-economic area as the parents who participated in the workshops. - The programme also considered the schools DEIS plan, therefore considering the professional opinion of the teachers who work with the children.

Family literacy should be beneficial to both children and adults.	- Both children and adults were invited to attend the family literacy workshops (see section 4.2 for the 'action' phase of this PAR), with parents outlining various benefits to themselves and their children (see section 5.3).
Participants should be involved in all elements of the programmes, including planning, delivery and promotion.	- The PEG were invited to participate in all elements of the programme, including the planning (the focus group and reviewing analysis of it), the delivery (to attend and co-deliver the workshops; one parent did so and ran the workshops in Arabic) and promotion (all participants of the PEG actively recruited parents and spread the word about the workshops amongst the parent community).
Collaborative partnerships should be prioritised to develop and sustain family literacy.	- A collaborative partnership was formed with the PEG in designing, planning and delivering this programme to ensure that they were active participants in this action research study. - Collaborative partnerships were also formed with the parents who participated in the workshops, considering their feedback and ideas throughout. - Collaborative partnership is now regularly prioritised in the school, with the school currently having a strong Parents Association comprising many of the PEG and workshop participants.
Ensure that sufficient learner supports exist.	- Practical supports such as the time that the workshops took place (morning time as suggested by the PEG and in agreement with the workshop participants), the inclusion of children and younger siblings in the sessions (to overcome child care barriers) and the provision of the workshops in Arabic (a dominant language in the school community) ensured that learners were sufficiently supported to engage with the programme for the four weeks (see section 5.3.2.3.3 for enablers which promoted success). - Asyah, the parent who facilitated the workshops in Arabic met with me briefly before each workshop to go over the layout and structure of the session to ensure that she was confident in supporting other parents and that we had sufficient resources to do so (including

	translating the book for the 'Shared Reading' workshop into Arabic) (see section 5.3.2.3.3). She was positioned as the 'expert' (as she also participated in the PEG and the interviews) and reported that she enjoyed the process.
Celebrate achievements in family literacy to raise awareness and acknowledge successful programmes.	- When the four-week programme and the post-workshop interviews finished, all parents who participated in the research were invited into the school for an awards ceremony where they and their child were presented with a certificate of completion. - In line with the school image policy and the parent's consent, the images have been used to promote other parental engagement opportunities.

4.2.3 Conclusion

To conclude, the 'planning' phase of the action research was carried out from November 2021 to May 2022. This phase incorporated the thoughts, opinions and ideas of the six parents who participated in the PEG focus group and considered guidelines set out by NALA (2020) and other relevant literature. The PEG participants acted as co-constructors of the 'action' phase, a set of family literacy workshops designed for parents by parents. This set of workshops aimed to be learner-centred, focused on the needs of the group (as identified by the PEG), provided sufficient learner support and prioritised the development of strong relationships between the home and the school, leading to benefits for all as reported by parents.

4.3 Action

Parents of children in Early Start and junior infants were invited to attend the workshops through information sheets, an advertisement poster (see appendices) and an information video, with twenty-eight parents agreeing to participate with their children. All participants were then invited to participate in a pre-workshop semi-structured interview (see Appendix G for the interview schedule), with eight agreeing to do so (see section 4.4). Following this, the 'action' began, and the family literacy sessions took place in May 2022. Two members of the PEG participated in the workshops and helped to implement it with other parents, with one parent co-facilitating the workshops in Arabic for a

group of mothers who speak English as an additional language (see section 5.3.2.3.3). The involvement of these two parents in the workshop process, particularly the translator parent, ensured that the parent's 'expert' voice was carried through all stages of the research.

4.3.1 Workshop Schedule

This family literacy workshop programme consisted of four sessions, which took place every Thursday morning for four weeks in May 2022. All sessions incorporated ideas from the PEG focus group, the family literacy guidelines (NALA, 2020) and other relevant literature. The sessions were titled 'Literacy in the Environment', 'Literacy in the Kitchen', 'Shared Reading' and 'Library Visit'. A brief outline of the structure of each session is presented below. All activities aimed to be flexible, transferable, of interest to children and engaging. Common games and activities were used throughout the four weeks to consolidate and allow opportunities for practising and using the ideas. The sessions began primarily with an oral focus and ended with a more formal literacy focus, ensuring the proximal process of the development of family literacy practices got increasingly more difficult over time. Some non-identifiable photographs were taken throughout the sessions with parent consent (see appendices).

4.3.1.1 *'Literacy in the Environment'*

The first session incorporated the PEG's suggestions to use the local environment to develop language and literacy skills and took place in the local park. The parents, children and I met in the schoolyard, and each family was given a high visibility jacket (for safety reasons), a magnifying glass (to investigate the local print-rich environment), a clipboard with a scavenger hunt template attached and a pencil (see Appendix M). The scavenger hunt template was tailor-made for this particular activity and had an emergent literacy focus. It focussed on the literacy concepts of phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, listening skills, free writing skills, rhyme and oral retelling (see Appendix H). There were two differentiated scavenger hunts for this activity, with the intention being one for junior infant children and one for Early Start children (see Appendix M). Before the hunt began, I modelled a number of games which

could be played by families during or after the hunt, including a literacy version of 'Simon Says' and 'I-Spy'. I also shared tips on completing the scavenger hunt and practical ideas for the children's engagement in the session. Parents and children completed the scavenger hunt together as a family, with the group of parents who speak Arabic being facilitated by Asyah, the translator parent who participated in the PEG. When families finished the literacy scavenger hunt, they were encouraged to play the games modelled at the beginning of the session, as outlined above. Upon completion of the activity, all families were encouraged to engage in oral retelling on the short walk back to the school, whereby I modelled questioning for parents around the session content, including questions such as 'Did you enjoy your time in the park? What did you like about it? Tell me your favourite/ the best part'. Parents received a 'tips and tricks' sheet at the end of the session with some ideas for extensions of the games we played in the session (see Appendix O).

Figure 5

Non-identifiable photograph taken during the 'Literacy in the Environment' session



4.3.1.2 'Literacy in the Kitchen'

The second session incorporated PEG suggestions of activities that can be implemented in the home, in particular in the kitchen, for the development of language and literacy skills and took place in the school's kitchen. The group was split into two sessions (with parents choosing the time that suited them best), which were facilitated by Asyah, the translator parent and I. All families received a cooking pack containing the ingredients in labelled bags, the relevant equipment, a pictorial method sheet, a tips and tricks sheet, an alphabet mat and a blank baking procedure sheet for early finishers (see figure 6).

Figure 6

Photograph showing the equipment and resources for the 'Literacy in the Kitchen' session



The purpose of this literacy session was to introduce informal activities which could be incorporated during baking and cooking activities in the home. Parents and children were asked to make 'literacy cookies' whereby they shaped the dough to spell the child's first name (using the alphabet mat as a support where needed). The concepts of phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, print concepts, rhymes, blending and segmenting, oral retelling and predicting were encouraged, as were listening skills and questioning. All parents were given a

'tips and tricks' sheet to use during the session and take home (see Appendix S). The games introduced during last week's session ('Literacy in the Environment') were modelled again, and parents were encouraged to engage in the suggested activities throughout.

4.3.1.3 'Shared Reading'

This session took place in the school hall. Children were asked to bring their favourite teddy with them for this session so that they could read or retell the story to their teddy. All families were given a pre-made pack containing a copy of the book "We're Going on a Bear Hunt", lollipop stick puppets of the characters from the book, sequencing cards of the story and a tips and tricks sheet (see appendices). I began the session by modelling key concepts, including ideas for a picture walk, predictions, questioning, sequencing and oral retelling. Other literacy concepts were encouraged, such as phonological awareness, blending and segmenting and alphabet knowledge ideas. Parents and their children then read and re-read the story using the puppets and engaged in extension activities using the sequencing cards. Asyah led the session in Arabic, and we both walked around the hall, engaging with various parents and families throughout the session. All families took home their packs and books to keep.

Figure 7

Non-identifiable photograph taken during the 'Shared Reading' session



4.3.1.4 'Library Visit'

The final session took place in the local library and again due to the size of the space meant that the group was divided in two, based on parent preferences of time. On the walk to the library, the games that had been learned in the previous weeks were encouraged, including I-Spy and Simon Says, as well as encouragement to look for literacy and print in the environment. At the library, the children and parents were given a quick tour and encouraged to browse the books and enjoy some informal shared reading time for a few minutes. A library staff member then read a big book for the children, demonstrating numerous reading ideas for parents. All parents signed up to receive a library card, and some took out books for both themselves and their children. The main focus of this session was to introduce parents to the library and to show them the accessibility of the library in terms of location and also in terms of use. Parents were encouraged to use some of the skills they had learned in last week's shared reading session with children when browsing and choosing books.

Figure 8

Non-identifiable photograph taken during the 'Library Visit' session



4.3.2 Workshop Participants

Twenty-eight parents and families participated in the workshops. The Early Start and junior infant classes in the school at the time contained sixty children, and the parents/guardians of all of these children were given the opportunity to participate in the workshops. Twenty-eight families engaged in total. The participant group consisted of a mixture of mothers, fathers and one grandparent, some of whom attended together and some on alternative weeks. For most families, the same parent attended each week; in other families, both parents attended some weeks, sometimes the mother attended, and sometimes the father attended. In total, 23 mothers attended, 8 fathers attended, and one grandmother attended. The participants were from varying backgrounds and nationalities and spoke varying languages. Twelve families spoke English as their first language. Other languages included Akan, Nepali, Polish, Croatian, Mandarin, and Yoruba, with Arabic being the second most popular language after English. Most parents had sufficient English to engage in and enjoy the workshops; those who did not had the support of Asyah. Although there was a high turnout, as with other participants groups, the non- participants should be considered. I aimed to make participation in the research as straightforward as possible for the participants to encourage participation (e.g., time, location, child minding facilities). It was considered that participation may have been denied by the participants themselves for reasons such as prior commitments, lack of time or lack of interest in the area. This was an essential factor to consider when planning the research and the non- participation of other parents could be deemed a limitation to this research (see section 3.11).

4.3.3 Field Notes

Descriptive and reflective field notes were used informally during the research process, particularly in the 'action' stage of the AR cycle. I took informal handwritten field notes during the four workshop sessions and aimed to be as neutral as possible. These field notes were used informally to support the 'reflection' and 'evaluation' elements of this AR from a researcher's point of view. I reflected on the field notes after each session, which helped me to plan and

prepare for the next session. A simple rubric was used to roughly document the most successful elements of the workshops, week by week, and to capture progress informally and the development of the proximal process of interest (see Appendix J for a blank sample and Appendix P, U and AA for weekly filled in rubrics). When I witnessed certain practices or interactions during the sessions, I documented them with a tick. These rough notes allowed me to evaluate and reflect on which aspects of literacy development and family learning practices were engaged in most and which may have needed more encouragement or support to implement. Short, informal handwritten notes highlighted key successes and things to consider for the next session.

In addition, reflective field notes were recorded throughout the process to document my personal development. These field notes summarise my opinions and impressions throughout the research process and are considered more subjective in nature. The possibility of my biases, viewpoints and personal responses have been considered. My personal growth and development have been recorded, and this story of the journey on which I have gone on over the past four years is one on which I will always have to reminisce and reflect on!

4.4 Reflection and Evaluation

The participants' thoughts, opinions and ideas were central to this qualitative action research. All parents who agreed to engage in the family literacy workshops were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview before the workshop process, with eight agreeing to participate. These parents spoke about their pre-existing family literacy practices, their motivations for joining the workshop process, potential outcomes they would experience from engaging in the process and their thoughts on home-school relationships, all of which are presented in section 5.2. Upon completion of the four workshop sessions, further evaluation and reflection occurred whereby the parents who participated in the workshops were asked to partake in a post-workshop interview. Fourteen parents agreed and gave their opinions on the workshop process, outcomes that they experienced, benefits they identified and their thoughts on home-school relationships. These interviews were analysed and evaluated, and the parent's thoughts and opinions were considered, and are outlined in section 5.3.

4.4.1 Pre and Post-Workshop Semi-Structured Interviews in this Research

Interviews are a qualitative and social method and were deemed a suitable data collection method for this action research as they allowed for flexible and open conversations, which explored the participants' perspectives, knowledge and experiences. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the parents of the children in the Early Start and junior infant classes who attended the workshops. Eight parents who participated in the workshops were interviewed in the pre-workshop. Six of those eight were interviewed post-workshops, as well as eight more participants who engaged in the workshops and agreed to be interviewed post-workshops.

4.4.1.1 *Development of interview schedule designs*

As with the focus group schedule design, appropriate language and vocabulary were used when composing the semi-structured interview questions for both the pre and post-workshop interviews, aiming to avoid any bias or ambiguity. The Plain English Guidelines (NALA, 2010) were adhered to when wording the questions to make the questions and the layout of the interview schedules as direct and clear as possible for the participants. The importance of the sequence of the questions was also considered.

The questions for the interview schedules were derived from an analysis of the relevant literature in the area, as well as the recommendations and ideas outlined in the PEG. The interview schedules aimed to address the relevant research questions (see Appendix F and G). The semi-structured interview questions used for both the pre and post-workshop interview schedules considered Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2006) PPCT model, which acts as the theoretical framework for this research, and included questions which explored each element of this model, the proximal process of developing family literacy practices, 'person' characteristics that both influence and are influenced by the proximal processes, 'context' and contextual barriers and 'time'.

Pre-workshop interview questions (see Appendix F) were based on pre-existing family literacy practices, participants' thoughts on home-school relationships and their confidence in scaffolding their children's literacy

development. The questions allowed participants to reflect on their experiences of the topics at hand and encouraged participants to outline what they hoped to gain from the workshop process. Post-workshop interview questions (see Appendix G) were based on participants' experiences in partaking in the workshops, what they learned/ took away from the workshops, characteristics of a good workshop session, any barriers they faced during the process and any recommendations they would make for future practice. The questions allowed participants to reflect on their experiences and encouraged honest feedback, as this data collection tool represented the 'reflection' and 'evaluation' phases of this action research. Opening, introductory, transition, key and ending questions were used in the semi-structured interview schedule design. The questions were sequenced so that they began as general and moved towards more specific ones. A final question asked the participants if there was anything that was missed or if they had anything more to contribute.

4.4.1.2 Piloting of Workshop Interview Schedules

The interview schedule for both the pre-workshop interviews and the post-workshop interviews were piloted before each set of interviews took place. The pre-workshop interviews piloting took place in April 2022 and included feedback from three parents of children aged 3-5, one a parent in the school who spoke English as an additional language (as is reflective of the school community), and two acquaintances of mine (one a mother and one a father of children aged 3 and 4), who were approached to review the interview schedule before carrying out the semi-structured interview. All were met individually at a suitable time. I read the questions aloud and asked them for any valuable feedback on the structure of the questions, the vocabulary, and the question content. They were also asked for their advice on what time they deemed suitable for parents to participate (two of the parents were working parents, and one was not). The parent with English as an additional language was encouraged to advise on how best to engage other parents from her culture and others and to indicate any cultural barriers that may inhibit parents from engaging in these pre-workshop interviews. All three were asked to outline any practical issues they foresaw in the interview process.

The above parents who participated in the pre-workshop interview piloting exercise also advised on the design and layout of the poster, advertisement and video used to promote the workshops (see Appendix K). The colours, shapes, layout, and wording of the poster and the wording and length of the video were evaluated by these parents to ensure that they were appropriate and appealing in promoting these workshops to support parents and children before the summer holidays and in preparation for junior and senior infants. The Plain English Guidelines (NALA, 2008) were adhered to, and the posters and video were made to be as aesthetically pleasing and engaging as possible.

For piloting the post-workshop interview schedule, advice was sought from two mothers and two fathers of children at an Early Start and junior infant age in the school who did not partake in the workshops but were members of the school community. Similar to the pre-workshop interview schedule piloting, one of the fathers spoke English as an additional language, and it was aimed that he would represent some of the parents who would partake in the post-workshop interviews. Parents were met individually in the school at a suitable time. I read the questions and asked them for any valuable feedback on the structure of the questions, the vocabulary, and the question content. The parent with English as an additional language was encouraged to advise on how best to facilitate other parents with English as an additional language and to indicate any cultural or linguistic barriers that may inhibit parents from engaging in the interview. Again, all parents that engaged in the piloting exercise were asked to outline any practical issues they foresaw in the interview process and were asked about what time they felt would be most suitable for parents of children this age. Based on the advice and suggestions, both the wording and the sequence of the questions changed.

4.4.1.3 Implementation of Semi-Structured Interviews

Following the pre-workshop semi-structured interview piloting exercise, information sheets were distributed to all parents of children in the school's Early Start and the two junior infant classes. Eight parents responded and agreed to partake. The interviews took place in the school on various days that suited the

participants. This was scheduled in advance based on the time that suited both parties. The same interview schedule was used for all sessions.

The post-workshop interviews took place the week after the final workshop had taken place. All parents who had attended the four-week programme were invited to participate in the post-workshop interviews, with a particular emphasis on the eight parents who had partaken in the pre-workshop interviews (to compare and contrast certain elements and ideas pre and post-workshop and see potential progress). Fourteen parents agreed to take part in the post-workshop interviews, six of the eight who participated in the pre-workshop interviews and eight parents who did not participate in pre-workshop interviews.

I facilitated, recorded, and transcribed all of the pre-and post-workshop interviews. A transcription service called 'Trint' was used to transcribe all interviews. The participants were put at ease beforehand, and the process of the interview was explained to them (this information had also been previously given to them orally and in the detailed information sheet (see Appendix C and D)), outlining all details to the parents (in particular with English as an additional language), leaving an opportunity for any questions they should have. It was outlined that the semi-structured interview questions would be used to guide the conversation on the research topic. It was emphasised to the participants that there were no right or wrong answers and that honesty would be appreciated in answering all questions. It was also outlined to the participants that I would draw the attention back to the researched topic if the conversation veered off topic. During the interview, I endeavoured to ensure that no bias or personal values of mine were manifest and assumed a neutral position while aiming to establish and maintain a good rapport with the participants throughout the interviews. Careful management of the encounter and the responses given during the interview were also considered. The participants' cultural, social, and linguistic norms were all considered and respected throughout the process. Clarity of questioning and mindfulness of the language used was ensured. It was explained to all participants that they had a right to withdraw at any time from the research. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed with all data collected. Upon completion of the pre and post-workshop individual interviews, the recordings and transcriptions were stored as outlined in the ethical approval received for the research.

4.4.2 Interview Participants

All twenty-eight who agreed to participate in the workshops were invited to participate in both pre and post-workshop interviews, with eight parents agreeing to participate in the pre-workshop interview and fourteen agreeing to participate in the post-workshop interview. The participant profiles for the parents who participated in both the pre-workshop interviews and the post-workshop interviews are outlined in this section. For this research, all participants were given pseudonyms derived using a random name generator while acknowledging the participant's culture and nationality. Pre-workshop participant profiles are outlined in Table 5 and post-workshop participant profiles are outlined in Table 6.

4.4.2.1 Pre-Workshop Interview Participants

Table 5 presents the pre-workshop interview participant profiles.

Table 5

Pre-workshop Interview Participant Profiles

Parent Pseudonym	Nationality	First Language	Number of children	Children's class in school	Children's nationality	Children's first language
Tracey	Irish	English	2	Junior Infants and 1 st Class	Irish	English
Chana	Nepalese	Nepali	2	Junior Infants and 1 st Class	Nepalese	English
Robin	Canadian	English	1	Junior Infants	Canadian	English
Yuna-	Chinese	Mandarin	3	Early Start, Junior Infants and Senior Infants	Irish	English
Natalie	Polish	Polish	3	Early Start, Junior Infants and 2 nd Class	Irish	English
Asyah	Libyan	Arabic	3	Early Start, Senior Infants and 1 st Class	Irish	Arabic
Zerina	Mauritian	French	2	Junior Infants and one younger	Irish	English
Amelia	Irish	English	3	Junior Infants, Fourth Class and one in secondary school	Irish	English

4.4.2.2 Post-Workshop Interview Participants

Table 6 presents the post-workshop interview participant profiles.

Table 6

Post-workshop Interview Participant Profiles

Parent's pseudonym	Parent's nationality	Parent's first language	Number of children	Children's class in school	Children's nationality	Children's first language	Participated in pre workshop interview
Kofi	Ghana	Akan	3	Junior Infants and two younger children	Irish	English	No
Agung	Nepalese	Nepali	1	Junior Infants	Irish	English	No
Tracey	Irish	English	2	Junior Infants and 1 st Class	Irish	English	Yes
Natalie	Polish	Polish	3	Early Start, Junior Infants and 2 nd class	Irish	English	Yes
Yuna	Chinese	Mandarin	3	Early Start, Junior Infants and Senior Infants	Irish	English	Yes
Eva	Polish	Polish	3	Early Start and Senior Infants (twins)	Polish	English	No
Vedran	Croatian	Croatian	1	Junior Infants	Irish	English	No
Chloe	Irish	English	1	Junior Infants	Irish	English	No
Kaylee	Irish	English	2	Junior Infants and one younger child	Irish	English	No
Asyah	Libyan	Arabic	3	Early Start, Senior Infants and 1 st class	Irish	Arabic	Yes
Robin	Canadian	English	1	Junior Infants	Canadian	English	Yes
Amelia	Irish	English	3	Junior Infants, 4 th class and secondary school	Irish	English	Yes
Abebi	Nigerian	Yoruba	3	Two in Junior Infants and one younger child	Irish	English	No
Amira	Libyan	Arabic	2	Early Start and one younger	Irish	Arabic	No

As outlined in sections 4.2 and 4.3 in relation to the other participants groups, the non- participants should be considered. I aimed to make participation in the interviews as straightforward as possible for the participants to encourage participation (e.g., time and location). It was considered that participation may have been denied by the participants themselves for reasons such as prior commitments, language, lack of time or lack of interest in the area. This was an essential factor to consider when planning the research and the non- participation of other parents could be deemed a limitation to this research (see section 3.11).

4.4.3 Reflexivity and the Role of the Researcher

“Perhaps, even more in developmental science than in other fields, the pathways to discovery are not easy to find. The trails are not marked, there are many dead ends, the journey is far longer than expected, and at the end, little may be there. What counts is what one learns along the way and passes on to future explorers of uncharted terrain.”

(Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 825)

The idea of reflexivity and the importance of recognising and identifying the role of the researcher is central to a professional doctorate and was considered throughout this research. This doctoral research has offered opportunities for personal growth and reflection (see section 7.1.1). As outlined in section 3.6, I was aware of first- person practice (as outlined in Reason and Torbert, 2001) throughout this research, which encouraged me to consider the “skills and methods [that] address the ability of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act awaredly and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting” (p17). This stage of the framework encouraged me as a researcher to develop my own skills and understanding, to assess the impact of my actions on others and to critically explore my own purposes and behaviours (as outlined in Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Engaging in research at this level has allowed me to develop my critical thinking skills, to gain valuable experience in writing and communicating complex and, at times, confusing ideas and has offered an opportunity to attempt to gain expertise in areas of research that I am passionate about. Over the past four years, I have

considered my positionality and my own views and opinions that I have developed through my personal and professional experiences and how they may have influenced my research journey.

My role as the role of the researcher and the HSCL (and formerly as a teacher) in the school was one which I considered throughout this research process. Action researchers must ensure to continually reflect and examine their practice through the research process (Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 2005), and in accordance with this thought, reflexivity was prioritised throughout the research process. Elliott (1991) explores the difficulties that 'insider researchers' may encounter during the action research process and emphasises the importance of engaging in meta-reflections on the issues which arise as an insider researcher. According to Payne and Payne (2011), researchers who prioritise reflexivity ensure that they are "self-aware of their own beliefs, values and attitudes, and their personal effects on the setting they have studied, and self-critical about their research methods and how they have been applied" (p. 191). Reflexivity in action research allows for a deeper understanding of the power dynamics which may be at play and promotes collaboration and genuine engagement of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Action research is deemed a continuous and evolving process in which the researcher evolves, develops and learns throughout, something which was considered throughout this doctoral journey.

Self-reflexivity played a crucial role in this research and was carried out using reflexive field notes, which aimed to work as an aid to "seek out [one's] own subjectivity" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). Notes taken during, throughout and after meetings with my research supervisors acted as self-reflexive practice also and were considered in the final writings of this doctoral thesis. The idea of my position as HSCL in the school as being a position of power in conventional research is one which was considered to a great extent, and the adoption of AR as the research approach, grounded in the ideas of critical theory, aimed to alleviate this issue to a certain extent by granting the participants additional responsibility and engagement in the research process. The importance of reflexivity when carrying out critical theory research is outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), stating that reflexivity is critical to ensure that the social

inequalities and power dynamics being explored are done in a transformative and ethical manner to promote social justice.

In addition, reflexivity as recognition of the other (as explored in Pillow, 2010) played a critical part in this research. As outlined previously, this research was conducted with the participants and not on them, ensuring they had a meaningful role in the co-development of these workshops. The recognition of and collaboration with the PEG aimed to help address this group's misrepresentation. The data generated for this research explored not only my perspective as the researcher but also the perspective of the participants, in particular through the Parent Expert Group (PEG). Reflecting on participant statements and clarifying any ambiguity with them allowed for a critical examination of participant views and aimed to ensure that participants' voices were accurately described and represented.

I approached this study with an open mind and an awareness that I intended this action research to be a reflexive research approach in order to ensure genuine engagement with participants. Having worked in this DEIS school for nine years and upon carrying out an in-depth reading of the literature associated with the topic being researched, it is evident that much of the literature in this area takes a deficit view when researching low-SES parental involvement in the emergent language and literacy development of their children in low-SES areas. An awareness of the deficit approach that exists among educators, researchers and, at times, policymakers ensured that I approached this research intending to challenge this viewpoint. The engagement of the PEG allowed for this deficit viewpoint to be challenged as it placed deserving value on the pre-existing family literacy practices that these families engage in and placed value on their opinions, thoughts and ideas, in particular the ideas put forward by the PEG for the development of the series of family literacy workshops tailored specifically for the school community.

This research explicitly endeavoured to take a non-deficit stance, welcoming and valuing all input from participants as shared constructors of this research while also ensuring the use of non-deficit language throughout the research process. This was achieved through careful planning and consideration of the language used throughout the research study. When designing the materials for use during this research process (for example, the focus group and

interview schedules (see Appendix F, G and H)), numerous attempts to ensure no deficit language was used were made by both my supervisors and I. The importance of using non-deficit language is critical to this research and was considered throughout, in both the writing and presentation of the thesis and in the interactions with participants. The comfortable and welcoming physical environment and atmosphere that was prioritised throughout the research stage with the participants, as well as the promotion of genuine relationships also aimed to ensure a non-deficit stance was prioritised (including the setup of the room for the focus group and interviews and the opportunities for informal conversations and cups of tea before and afterwards).

Throughout the preparation of and engagement with this research, I attempted to consider and acknowledge my own beliefs, biases, assumptions, and opinions. I was aware that I (being a HSCL and formerly a classroom teacher from a different area of Ireland and not a parent) and the participants (all parents from the local area) may have had presupposed ideas on the areas of research. It was considered that the assumptions, beliefs, and values which I brought to this research may have influenced the study during the data collection, data analysis and interpretation phases, as outlined in Mertens (2015). As outlined by McNiff and Whitehead (2010), action researchers must be aware and conscious of the impact of their actions and values on both the action research process and on the participants, something which I considered throughout. The use of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model as a framework allowed me to come to this research with a clear structure in which to analyse the process and the data and aimed to alleviate potential bias. Scott and Usher (1996) outline that "as researchers, we all have an individual trajectory which shapes the research we do, the questions we ask and the way we do it. However, as researchers, we are also socio-culturally located; we have a social autobiography, and this has an equally, if not more important, part to play in shaping our research and directing the kinds of reflexive questions which need to be asked but rarely are" (p.32). The consideration of this thought as well as alternative perspectives (including those of my research supervisors and, most importantly, those of the participants who engaged in this action research) allowed for critical personal reflection and reflexivity to be prioritised.

4.5 Analysis of the Data for this Research

The data produced for this research produced data in terms of first, second and third- person research (as outlined in Reason and Torbert, 2001). Field notes, reflexive notes and notes taken during lectures, supervisor meetings and other professional conversations were analysed to form my reflective statement and to monitor my own personal growth throughout this process (see section 7.1.1).

Data gathered from the focus group and the semi-structured interviews, demonstrating the second and third-person research, was analysed using a deductive or theoretical approach, which was driven by my theoretical and analytical interests. The predetermined research questions guided the coding process during the various stages of analysis. I engaged in a recursive process during the analysis of this data (as outlined in Braun and Clarke, 2006), whereby the data was read and re-read a number of times. As outlined by Smithson (2000), I was aware and considered that both the focus groups and the semi-structured interviews did not occur naturally but in a specific and controlled setting (the school) in the presence of I, the researcher.

The first data to be analysed was the transcript from the PEG focus group (to design the workshop schedule), followed by the pre and post-workshop interviews. The six steps outlined in Braun and Clarke's (2006), *Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology* were followed and are outlined below.

Step 1: Familiarisation of data

The process began by familiarising myself with the data. After the initial collection of the data, I transcribed every recording with the help of a software called 'Trint', allowing for immersion in the data. According to Bird (2005), the transcription phase is a "key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology" (p. 227). It is a phase that allows the researcher to become familiar with the data and informs the early stages of analysis (Riessman, 1993). This stage offered key insights into the data and allowed for connections to be made from the onset.

Step 2: Generation of codes

The data was organised into meaningful groups in the second phase of the analysis, as outlined in Tuckett (2005). The initial codes were generated by identifying recurring patterns using hard copies of the transcripts and coloured highlighter pens. Open coding was used, whereby some codes were derived in advance from the literature, and some codes were developed and modified throughout the data analysis process. The analysis and critique of existing research on parental engagement, educational disadvantage and family literacy, as outlined in the literature review, were considered when selecting and defining the specific themes used for data analysis for this research. All transcripts were analysed firstly using various coloured markers and highlighters. Next, the data was uploaded to the NVivo Plus 12 software on my personal laptop (see Figure 9 for coding example), and more extensive coding was undertaken. Some, but not all, codes used to analyse the PEG and pre-workshop interviews were common to those used to analyse the post-workshop interviews.

Step 3: Combining codes into themes

I searched for themes in phase three of Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines and reviewed the initial codes identified earlier to form overarching themes.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

Next, the themes were refined, and Patton's (1990) ideas of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity were considered. The themes were then named and defined, and sub-themes were developed.

Step 5: Determining the significance of themes

The significance of themes was then determined through careful examination and interpretation of the data over several months. This involved identifying patterns, connections and reoccurring ideas within the themes.

Step 6: Reporting of findings

The analysis reports for the PEG, pre-workshop, and post-workshop data were produced. These reports were read and reread numerous times with various changes being made over a number of months. These reports aimed to be a

“concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data might tell”, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 93). The final PEG focus group conversation transcript was offered to the PEG for review, as was the workshop schedule. Two participants reviewed both, which aimed to ensure that the participants' voices were represented correctly. The final reports as presented in section 4.2.1.4 (the PEG findings), and in section 5.2 (the pre-workshop interview findings) and section 5.3 (the post-workshop interview findings).

Figure 9

Sample of Thematic Analysis Coding from NVivo 12

Language and Literacy	0	0	14/03/2022 19:37	MK	14/03/2022 19:37
Emergent literacy	2	6	04/02/2022 14:50	MK	19/02/2022 15:35
Family Literacy	1	3	19/02/2022 14:48	MK	19/02/2022 15:20
Importance of literacy and education	2	9	16/02/2022 19:37	MK	19/02/2022 15:34
Literacy activities	1	33	04/02/2022 13:37	MK	16/02/2022 19:31
Books in the home	2	8	16/02/2022 19:34	MK	19/02/2022 14:51
Bought resources	1	2	16/02/2022 19:29	MK	16/02/2022 19:32
Free writing	1	3	16/02/2022 19:32	MK	16/02/2022 19:33
Ideal time for reading	2	8	16/02/2022 19:36	MK	19/02/2022 14:52
Library visits	1	3	16/02/2022 19:31	MK	16/02/2022 19:38
Other	2	8	16/02/2022 19:33	MK	19/02/2022 15:35
Print in the environment	2	8	16/02/2022 19:27	MK	19/02/2022 14:36
Reading activities	2	16	16/02/2022 19:35	MK	19/02/2022 15:25
Oral language activities	1	25	04/02/2022 13:43	MK	19/02/2022 14:15
Development of vocab	1	1	16/02/2022 19:46	MK	16/02/2022 19:46
Integrating Irish	1	3	16/02/2022 19:39	MK	16/02/2022 19:41
Other	2	7	16/02/2022 19:43	MK	19/02/2022 15:17
Phonics	0	0	16/02/2022 19:44	MK	16/02/2022 19:44
Use of music and song	1	4	16/02/2022 19:42	MK	16/02/2022 19:45
Use of the environment	2	12	16/02/2022 19:42	MK	19/02/2022 15:20

The presentation of the data analysed for this research follows the progression of this action research from planning to action to reflection to evaluation. As outlined, the first data analysis, that of the PEG conversation in the 'planning' stage, is outlined in this chapter, in section 4.2.1.4, and explores gathering ideas and opinions from the PEG to form the workshop design and schedule. These ideas, as well as pre-existing guidelines for family literacy (NALA, 2020) (as outlined in 4.2.2), were combined to form the basis for the 'action'- the tailored

family literacy programme that took place in May 2022 with twenty-eight families of children in Early Start and junior infants. The analysis of the pre and post-workshop interviews carried out with the parents in the 'reflection' and evaluation stages is outlined in the next chapter, chapter 5.

4.6 Chapter Conclusion

Chapter four outlines the empirical steps taken for this qualitative action research cycle. Taking a non-traditional structure, this chapter merges methods and findings to tell the story of this research study in order of occurrence. The chapter begins by presenting the three research questions. Section 4.1 briefly explores the AR cycle for this research, outlining the 'planning', 'action', 'reflection' and 'evaluation' stages. Section 4.2 looks at the 'planning' stage and considers the participants, as well as the development, piloting and implementation of the focus group as a research tool. The PEG as a focus group is considered. The PEG findings are presented thematically, as are the guidelines for family literacy programmes as outlined by NALA (2020), which were central to the formation of the design of this family literacy programme. The 'action' phase is presented in section 4.3, whereby a brief overview of the content prioritised for each of the four family literacy workshops is given, followed by an outline of the workshop participants. The informal field notes that were taken for this research are discussed briefly. The 'reflection' and 'evaluation' stages of the research are outlined in section 4.4, focussing on the pre and post-workshop semi-structured interviews. The research participants and the development, piloting and implementation of the interview schedules are outlined. My reflexivity is considered, as is my role as a researcher, both of which are important elements of this study. The chapter concludes with a description of the data analysis phases that took place for this research, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps. The data analysis for the pre and post-workshop interviews is presented in chapter 5.

5 Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will present an in-depth analysis of the data collected for this research through qualitative semi-structured individual interviews. This data was analysed using a deductive or theoretical approach, which was driven by my theoretical and analytical interests (as outlined in previous chapters). The data collected for this research is presented in two sections- an analysis of the pre-workshop semi-structured interviews and an analysis of the post-workshop semi-structured interviews. Each data set is presented thematically and considers Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model. This chapter aims to be rich in detail and provide a deep understanding of the research questions, as well as the experiences and thoughts of the participants, who were parents of children in Early Start and junior infants in this urban DEIS band 1 primary school.

The presentation of this data for this study follows the progression of the action research cycle from the stages of planning to action (as outlined in chapter 4) to reflection and evaluation, as will be outlined in this chapter. This chapter begins by presenting the findings from the pre-workshop semi-structured individual interviews in which eight parents engaged in, addressing research questions 1 and 2. This section explores the pre-existing family literacy practices in the homes of these families, their thoughts on home-school relationships and their motivations and hopes for engaging in the family literacy workshops. Section 5.3 explores the thoughts and reflections of the parents who engaged in the workshops after the process had taken place. This section delves into the experiences of parents who engaged in the family literacy workshops and briefly explores their relationship with the school (addressing research questions 1, 2 and 3). Sections 5.2 and 5.3 outline the 'reflection' phase, whereby the parent's thoughts and experiences are outlined, and the 'evaluation' phase of this AR cycle is represented in the post-workshop interview analysis. The predetermined research questions outlined in section 1.4 guided the coding process during the various stages of analysis.

5.2 Pre-Workshop Interviews Findings

All parents of children in Early Start and junior infants who agreed to participate in the PEG-designed family literacy workshops were invited to partake in a pre-workshop interview. Eight parents agreed to participate in the pre-workshop interviews (see section 4.4.2.1 for participant profiles). The semi-structured interviews were based on a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix F). The interview schedule aimed to address research questions 1 and 2. The eight pre-workshop interviews have been analysed thematically considering Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, with the emerging themes being outlined in section 5.2. The first section, section 5.2.1, explores the proximal processes of family literacy in detail, examining the kinds of activities carried out in these families' homes. Section 5.2.2 presents the characteristics of the two people interacting within this proximal process, the child and the adult, respectively and how the characteristics of these two people influence the proximal process. Section 5.2.3 delves into the home-school relationships that these families experience in the context of this DEIS band 1 school. Finally, section 5.2.4 outlines the barriers these parents face, which may inhibit them from engaging in the proximal process of family learning or forming strong home-school relationships.

In brief, the findings outlined in this section explore the rich pre-existing practices that these families engage in and the importance placed on literacy development in the homes of these families. All parents reported that they are motivated to support their children's language and literacy development and engage in regular practices to do so. All parents interviewed outlined that they had some confidence in supporting their children's language and literacy development but were open to developing this confidence through this opportunity to engage in this set of family literacy workshops. Parents expressed that they hoped this family literacy opportunity would provide learning and social benefits for them, their children, and their families. Parents reported that strong home-school relationships exist in the context of this DEIS school and that positive communication exists between the home and the school. These findings will be explored in greater detail in the following sections.

5.2.1 Family Literacy

As outlined, all participants were questioned on the pre-existing language and literacy activities that take place in their homes and local environments.

Questions about how, where, when and why these activities are carried out were asked of all participants. For the purpose of this analysis, as outlined in the methodology, the participant's thoughts have been thematically arranged and analysed under the headings of oral language activities, reading practices, family literacy in the real world, the when, where, how and who of these activities, home language development and the importance of language and literacy, indicating that these parents are well prepared to support and encourage language and literacy development in the home, both in English and their home languages in some cases.

5.2.1.1 Oral Language Activities

The findings highlighted the importance of oral language and the rich range of activities used by the participants to encourage language activities in the home. Asyah, Amelia, Tracey, Natalie, Yuna and Chana all outlined that they encourage oral retelling after the day in school, whereby they ask probing questions about what their child did during the day. Zerina explained that her daughter enjoys oral stories about when Zerina was young and growing up in Mauritius. Tracey shared that she does toy reviews with her children and takes videos of them reviewing their favourite toys to develop language and confidence. She also explained that she encourages her children to create fictional characters and oral stories around them and play games such as I-Spy when she is out in the local environment with her children. The use of puppets to elicit language was mentioned by Yuna, who encourages her children to tell each other stories in a shadow puppet show. She also discussed that she encourages her children to be curious, and when they have a question, she uses her phone or computer to research it by searching for videos which will explain the topic and broaden her children's oral language and vocabulary on the topic. She gave an example of a recent event whereby the school was closed due to a storm, and her children were unfamiliar with the word 'storm' before this. She found short educational videos online to inform her children, as well as dramatic videos to keep their interest, ensuring the

consolidation of learning by questioning and engaging in conversation around the topic at the time and afterwards. Chana explained how she encourages a lot of conversation before and after she reads a book to her children, including oral prediction beforehand and retelling using toys as characters afterwards. It is evident that language activities are prioritised in the homes of these families and that regular reciprocal interactions to improve language skills take place in these homes.

5.2.1.2 Reading Practices

All parents reported the reading practices that take place in their homes and the activities that they encourage to promote the development of their children's literacy skills, displaying creativity with their ideas and highlighting the importance of supporting both English and their home languages where relevant. All participants described the practice of reading in the home and their access to books. Visiting bookshops and libraries was identified as a way to add variety to the books that are read in the home. Tracey mentioned that she visits her local library once every two weeks with her children. Asyah outlined that she visits Eason's bookshop with her children, particularly before they go on holiday, and orders dual language books in both Arabic and English for her children online. Dual language books were also mentioned by Natalie, who buys her children books in both Polish and English to encourage a love and "interest" in their home language. She stated that she prefers to buy her children books rather than toys as the children get bored of toys quickly but get endless entertainment from their many books. Children's magazines were suggested as an alternative literacy resource by Robin, who outlined that her son enjoys the puzzles, games and stories in them.

Routines and practices around book reading were outlined during the interviews, including pre-reading practices. Searching for sight words within books, as well as looking for various sounds and letters, was described by Tracey as a way to keep children engaged in the story. Natalie's youngest children, who have not learned to read yet, "open the book and just talk to you", using their emergent literacy skills such as letter recognition and print awareness. Natalie outlined that she uses repetition to increase her children's confidence and often

re-reads the same book numerous times, "so they almost know them like, in order, they're memorised". The idea of her child learning to "sound stuff out because clearly he is learning to read" is mentioned by Robin, who stated that she is fascinated to watch her son morning and evening when they read as a family. The importance of social skills development during reading also emerged during the interviews, such as taking turns, which was highlighted by some parents. Chana explained that her children take turns being the 'teacher' who teaches the other family members about the book and leads story time. The 'teacher' encourages the 'students' to predict what will happen in the book using the pictures and often tells an alternative imaginary ending to the story, while also focusing on letter, sight word and sound recognition. To conclude, all parents reported the reading practices that take place in their homes and the activities that they encourage to promote the development of their children's literacy skills. These proximal processes are stimulating, face-to-face and reciprocal, and they drive development.

5.2.1.3 Family Literacy Practices in the Real World

Aside from sitting down and reading a book, a number of other literacy-based activities were outlined by these parents. The use of technology, print-rich environments and a variety of resources were suggestions put forward by parents to engage their children in language and literacy activities and learning. The use of technology (such as introducing their children to informative videos and cartoons on YouTube, including Jolly Phonics videos) to support children's literacy learning and to engage them was mentioned by three parents. Others sought to ensure that the home is a print-rich environment. Tracey outlined that she displays sight words in the home, while Natalie explained that she has alphabet magnets on her fridge and heaters. Similarly, Amelia, who encourages her child to "read a packet with a name on it, you know, for her letters", also uses opportunities such as reading the writing/logos on clothing, food boxes and environmental signs such as the writing on Luas and bus stops to encourage her child to develop literacy skills. Tracey expressed that she uses alphabet stamps (in both lower-case and upper-case letters), as well as words and letters that she has cut out of newspapers to create books with her children. The use of

resources that the school has supplied was outlined by Natalie, who mentioned that she receives extra support from the school due to her child's additional needs. The integration of her son's interests into literacy-based activities was outlined by Chana, who spoke about sticking letters onto miniature cars. She described how she races the cars with her son, encouraging recognition of the upper- and lower-case letters. Chana's family also use shopping trips to develop literacy skills by writing and reading shopping lists and focusing on reading words in the environment. Homework was mentioned as a literacy and language-based activity in the home by only two parents.

Other family learning activities that were not directly related to language or literacy development but have scope to allow for both were discussed. Lego and using other building blocks were outlined as activities that Asyah and Natalie encourage their children to enjoy. Baking and cooking allowed for family time in the homes of Zerina, Natalie and Tracey. Amelia discussed how her child recently enjoyed a gardening and planting event in the flat complex that she lives in, as she loves the outdoors and outdoor play opportunities. Chana expressed her love and her child's love for junk art, that is, using rubbish to design and construct artistic creations, explaining that "he loves arts and crafts, so I have a huge bag of odds and ends and scraps". Board games, playdough, jigsaws, drawing, colouring, using stickers to create images, as well as singing and dancing, were other ideas that parents, children and families engage in. It is apparent that varying resources (in addition to books) are valuable to families to ensure their children have continuous language and literacy development opportunities.

5.2.1.4 The When, Where, How and Who of these Activities

Language and literacy activities occur at various times of the day and week in these family's homes and outside in the local environment. Several locations and contexts for language and literacy activities were mentioned, including in Tracey's car on a "long journey" and in her garden, when Chana and her children "are doing the shopping" and when Amelia and her family "are on the Luas, she (her child) does be trying to read all of the signs". All parents except Asyah outlined that language and literacy activities occur mainly at home. The local area,

including the community and its amenities, was discussed by six parents. Amelia, Zerina, Robin, Chana and Asyah mentioned the parks in the area as a resource they use with their children. The local library was discussed by Tracey, who takes her children once every two weeks.

When asked about the most suitable time for such activities, six parents said before bedtime works with their families. Other times suggested were lunchtime at the weekends, morning time before school (due to busy schedules in the evening) and as the dinner is cooking in the evening. Evidently, the parents interviewed ensure that the proximal process of developing language and literacy skills happens regularly in numerous contexts and settings and at various times.

Motivating children to engage in activities was mentioned by parents during the interviews, with ideas ranging from reward systems for good behaviour to rule setting to routines. These practices aimed to promote independence, positive behaviour and engagement, all of which parents believe are important prerequisites to learning. Reward systems worked well for both Asyah and Yuna, who use incentives to promote positive behaviour and engagement. Prizes included money, treats and a choice of activities in the home. Creating rules in the home was mentioned by Asyah, who sometimes finds it difficult to discipline her children and would like to learn some ways of settling rules similar to those implemented in the class as she feels this type of discipline works very well for her child. Parenting practices vary between parents in some homes. Tracey and Natalie outlined that they feel that their children respond slightly better to their practices than their fathers. Similarly, in Zerina's home, both she and the children's father have a different way of parenting; "he has his own style", which she believes is positive. Parenting practices and ways that parents motivate their children to engage and learn vary from household to household; however, it is apparent that all parents prioritise positive parenting practices to support their children's development best.

Three parents mentioned the support that they get from their other children in supporting their children in Early Start and junior infants in their learning and development. Natalie, Chana and Amelia shared that their older daughters are an invaluable resource for supporting their younger children, particularly in reading with their younger siblings. In Natalie's home, her oldest daughter, who is in third class, will distract her younger siblings by reading to them if her mum is busy. As

outlined above, in Chana's home, her daughter acts as a 'teacher' to her son while reading to him and supports her mother's English language development. Evidently language and literacy activities take place in varying places and at varying times for the families interviewed.

5.2.1.5 Home Language Development

As outlined in the participant profiles (see section 4.4.2.1), five of the eight parents speak English as an additional language: Chana, Yuna, Natalie, Zerina and Asyah. This reflects the school community as a whole (see chapter 1 for research context). Only Asyah's children speak English as an additional language (with Arabic being their first language), while all other interviewee's children speak English as their first language. Four of the five relevant parents mentioned the development of their home language. As outlined previously, both Asyah and Natalie shared that they provide books for their children in dual languages, but both for different reasons. Natalie would like her children to learn some Polish (her first language) by reading books and speaking it so that when they visit her family in Poland, they can converse with them. Arabic is the first language in Asyah's home; therefore, she outlined that her children are most fluent in this language. They also attend Islamic school at the weekend and an after-school club during the week where they learn to read and speak in Arabic. In Zerina's and Natalie's homes, there are three different languages, including English and the mothers' and fathers' different first languages. Natalie acknowledged that, at times, it can be challenging to juggle Polish, Urdu and English; therefore, for easiness' sake, English is the main language. Similarly, in Zerina's house, they focus on English, mostly with "a few words" of Arabic; the children do not speak her home language (French) often. Chana, similar to Natalie above, would like her children to have some Nepali so that when they "fly and visit them (her family in Nepal), they won't be like what are they saying!". These findings highlight that parents value their home languages both for their usefulness in maintaining relationships with family members and friends and for communicative purposes. In conclusion, the importance of the home languages of the parents and families is evident from these interviews and was considered throughout the research process.

5.2.1.6 *The Importance of Language and Literacy Development*

The participants expressed the importance and value of language and literacy in various ways, and outlined the reasons they and their families engage in these activities. Overall, parents see language and literacy as important and allow time to develop both. They are motivated to engage in language and literacy activities with their children and are interested in this development, exhibiting the dispositions or force characteristics of motivation and interest in learning. For example, Asyah stressed that she sees it as vitally important that her children develop language and literacy skills to allow them to be independent in the future and to be successful. Tracey, who outlined numerous ways in which she encourages both language and literacy development, explained that these activities are important as she wants her children to be able to read fluently and to enjoy reading. "For me, it is important. I cannot imagine myself not paying attention to this", were Natalie's words when asked why she invests time into her children's literacy and language development. She added that literacy was important to her parents and grandparents, who instilled this idea in her, an idea which Robin echoed. Robin outlined that she and her husband have "been reading to him (her son) since he was born" and that she hopes this will pass on a love of literacy to her children. Interestingly, some parents mentioned the importance of developing language and literacy through play. Amelia referenced *Aistear*, the early childhood curriculum framework, and noted that her child adores *Aistear* in school. Furthermore, she outlined how her child's language has made a noteworthy improvement since she began learning through *Aistear* while remembering a recent occasion when her child used a word that Amelia was surprised her daughter knew, "it was a big word for a little person to use! I feel that it's just great, it's fantastic for the kid's language". She described how she prioritises furthering her child's learning by encouraging her to use the vocabulary and ideas she learns in *Aistear* in school while playing at home, making connections between the varying elements of her child's microsystems. Evidently, literacy and language development is prioritised and valued by the mothers who partook in these pre- workshop semi-structured interviews. Participating parents are motivated and interested in developing these skills in their children.

5.2.2 Child and Parent 'Person' Characteristics

Parents interviewed reported that the success of family language and literacy activities often varied based on elements of their child's 'person' characteristics, including their engagement, motivation and interest levels and ability as outlined in section 5.2.2.1. Some 'person' characteristics (dispositions, resource and demand characteristics) of parents were also explored through the pre-workshop semi-structured interviews, including parent confidence (section 5.2.2.2), parent engagement and motivations (5.2.2.3) and parenting practices (5.2.2.4).

5.2.2.1 Child Engagement and Motivation

Several parents commented on the importance of engaging their children when attempting to participate in family learning activities. Factors such as child mood, interest and motivation were all mentioned as factors which influence engagement. All parents agreed that it is often not beneficial to push their child if they are not interested or engaged in a task. On the contrary, when their child is interested and engaged, parents believe their child can be excited and motivated to learn. The importance of routine and structure are factors which Robin and Natalie mentioned as being key to their children's engagement levels. Various methods for promoting engagement were outlined, including reward systems, incentives such as stickers, count-down timers and positive reinforcement. The importance of their child being in the humour for engagement was common among most parents, with Natalie outlining, "I cannot force her (her daughter) if she says no, that's it!". Similarly, Chana noted that if her children are not engaged, it "is quite hard to get them to sit and to listen". These parents noted that they gauge their child's humour and judge whether it is the best time to encourage their child to participate in tasks or activities.

Several parents believed that engaging their children's interests in activities worked well for them. Asyah noted that she organises family trips around her child's interests in animals and, in turn, works on his vocabulary around the subject. The idea of allowing the children to choose their own activities for free play time at home was common among parents. Natalie stated that her children have "happy hours from four to six in the evening. They can do

whatever they want, they make a mess, whatever they want". Similarly, promoting child-led activities was outlined by Zerina, who explained that her daughter chooses her favourite activities, and Zerina tries to adapt them to ensure that some learning happens and that she holds her daughter's interests. Evidently, parents prioritise their children's interests and motivations when attempting to engage in language and literacy activities.

Some parents commented on their child's learning ability and participation in activities and tasks. The idea that all children learn and develop at different stages was noted by participants, whereby their children in Early Start or junior infants may have learned or developed at a different pace to their siblings. Two parents spoke about this in particular, Natalie and Amelia, outlining that a child-centred approach is vital to support their children's varying paces of development. Amelia, who has three daughters, two older than her child in junior infants, outlined that "every day is a challenge for her (her daughter in junior infants)", as her daughter's ability varies from that of her siblings. Child ability was noted, in particular, by parents of children with additional needs. Natalie outlined that her child in junior infants with Down Syndrome is "capable of doing everything, but she won't be on top of the class". It is clear that parents are aware of their children's abilities and aim to challenge them accordingly, ensuring to consider the child's interests and pace of development. Providing routine and structure and adapting to the child's needs are ways in which parents engage and challenge their children as appropriate. In conclusion, child engagement and motivation can have an important impact on the language and literacy activities that take place in the homes of these families.

5.2.2.2 Parent Confidence

All parents were questioned about their confidence in supporting their child's language and literacy development, with most parents reporting that they generally feel confident that they are capable of supporting their children at the stage they are currently at but are open to learning more as they lack knowledge in some areas and wish to develop this (see section 5.2.2.2). Parents were asked to rate their confidence on a scale of one to five, with one representing a lack of confidence and five representing high confidence. Robin stated that she would

rate herself between a three and a four out of five, as her child in junior infants is her oldest child, and therefore, this is her first time supporting a child of school age, commenting that "I obviously know that we can always improve". Chana rated herself a four, saying that if she really wants to engage and support her children, she knows that she can do it. Yuna stated that she is confident but needs more time to work with the children as they are still young, and therefore rated herself a four. Zerina also said she would rate herself a four out of five as she can manage now but perhaps will need more support in the future. Similarly, Natalie, who also rated herself a four, mentioned that she can also manage now but does appreciate any help she receives from the teachers. Due to the fact that she is unsure of what level her child should be performing at, Tracey rated herself a three out of five in terms of confidence but took solace in the fact that she is sure that the school will inform her if there is a problem, highlighting the strength of the home-school relationship that exists. Amelia did not give a number out of five but said that she is "not shy" and will ask for support if needed, particularly around the Irish language, which she does not feel confident in. Finally, Asyah also did not give a number on a scale of one to five but stated, "I need help". In summary, parental confidence in supporting their children's language and literacy development varies, with most parents acknowledging that they would appreciate help to boost their confidence and competence.

5.2.2.3 Parent Motivations

Parents were asked to explain their motivations for engaging in family literacy practices and their motivations for engaging in family literacy programmes and initiatives, including the series of family literacy workshops run as part of this research.

5.2.2.3.1 Motivations for Engaging in Family Literacy Practices

Regarding motivation for engaging in family literacy, parents gave a range of reasons, with responses ranging from developing their child's language and literacy skills to ensuring that their children were prepared for life's challenges by developing their confidence while ensuring they had the best basis for learning. Tracey's first reason for investing time in family literacy activities was to build her

child's confidence, followed by her aspirations for him to be a successful reader as he grows up. Natalie, whose child in junior infants has additional needs, encourages literacy activities to work on her child's independence and confidence. Amelia mentioned the importance of constantly speaking to her child to develop vocabulary. The importance of having appropriate literacy skills "for school" was highlighted by Zerina, who wants to ensure that her children are equipped for the challenges they may face in school. Chana mirrored this thought, outlining that she wants to ensure that her children have a "base" which will allow them to develop their language and literacy skills and "move up... towards the next level and the next level". Yuna and Asyah had similar ideas, with the former stating that she feels that family literacy time "helps them learn". Some parents reminisced about their own learning experiences as a child and how this may have influenced their positive attitude toward learning with their children. Her own personal love of reading was identified as a motivator for Robin, who "loved books growing up. I still read them, so I'm hoping that that gets passed on". She remembered that her mother always encouraged a love of books when she was growing up, something she wishes to pass on to her children. Natalie mentioned her childhood and the encouragement she received from her grandfather in Poland to read the newspaper, an idea that she now encourages at home with her own children.

Parents interviewed had positive attitudes to learning and outlined that they know that learning can happen in many locations and at different times, using different resources and that all learning is valuable and relevant, not just learning in school. All parents interviewed prioritised their children's learning and development. Clearly, parent's motivations for engaging in stimulating, regular and reciprocal family literacy activities are high and vary from wanting their children to have adequate literacy and language skills to ensuring that they are confident and independent as they grow up.

5.2.2.3.2 Motivations for Partaking in the Family Literacy Programmes

As outlined in the previous section, all parents were enthusiastic about their children's learning and interested in engaging with their child's development. Parents were also asked about their motivations to engage in structured family

literacy programmes outside the home, including this set of family literacy workshops. When asked why they agreed to partake in the family literacy workshops, parents mentioned reasons they felt would benefit them personally, their children in Early Start and junior infants and their wider families, with literacy and learning-driven motivations and social motivations outlined.

Personal motivations for parents to join the workshops included social reasons. Working on self-confidence, gaining knowledge, meeting other parents and doing something nice for themselves were all outlined. Natalie stated that she signed up for "selfish reasons...to spend some time talking to the parents and to you... to be with someone different than my kids". She acknowledged being "lonely" and looked forward to speaking to other parents and teachers. Similarly, Tracey mentioned "selfish reasons", namely meeting others and having an opportunity to learn some "new ideas around helping them (her children) and what we can do over the summer". Yuna, whose family have only joined the school this year, stated that she would like to get to know other parents and discuss the challenges that she faces with her children with other parents, as well as get an insight into how her children behave in the school environment around their peers and teachers. Similarly, Zerina mentioned that she would like to meet other parents and "to get to know each other" and learn ways to "improve" herself. Chana echoed the former thought by saying she was looking forward to "socialising more" with other parents in these workshops and to having fun and a "good time". The idea of doing something fun at school with her child was expressed by Robin, who stated that she was looking forward to getting to know other parents as well as being "fascinated to see how they (the children) are taught". Asyah noted that she joined the workshops "to help myself first, after that to help my son" in relation to his learning and development and to learn some tips from the workshops in relation to "rules and how to make activities fun". Amelia stated that she wants to get more involved with the school community now that her work commitments have lessened.

All parents also mentioned reasons that motivated them to join the workshops to support their children's language and literacy development, social development and relationships. Learning ways to support her child's literacy development and ways to "build on all of this (the content that her child learns in school)" was acknowledged by Amelia. The idea of picking up strategies to make

learning fun for her children was outlined by Zerina so that they will enjoy learning and not see it as a chore in the future. Robin also described that she is "fascinated to see how they are taught" in school and wishes to develop skills to support this best. Natalie has two children on a waiting list for speech and language therapy. She said she would like to learn some games and activities to help her daughter's language development and look forward to having more concentrated time with them. Parents also spoke about their child's social and emotional development and relationship building as motivators to engage in the workshops. Chana hoped her son would enjoy the workshops with her and his peers and friends. She mentioned that she hoped to use the workshops as an opportunity to organise more play dates for her child with his peers, a thought that was echoed by Robin, who suggested that perhaps the workshops could provide an opportunity for her son to develop a more positive attitude to school and to learn that "school can be fun sometimes" while having the chance to build his confidence and "be proud of his friends and show them off" to her. Asyah mentioned that she was motivated to attend the workshops to "make (her) child happy here" and build a stronger relationship with him. Yuna noted that she believes her children will benefit from her attending the workshops as "they will feel that we are involved". Tracey, who mentioned that she finds it challenging to get concentrated time with her child in junior infants due to commitments she has with his sibling who has additional needs, stated that she wanted her youngest son to have "the bit of extra time because you know like it is hard sometimes for him" and to have a chance to develop the relationship between her and her youngest son. Robin also noted that getting "concentrated, quality time" with her son was invaluable as she struggles with work commitments. Motivations for engaging in this set of family literacy workshops varied from perceived benefits for parents, children and the wider family and raised interesting points about the potential benefits of developing the proximal process of family learning with potential literacy and language benefits, social benefits and improved relationships.

Parents also discussed motivations for engaging in other programmes and initiatives. The idea of the parents keeping up to date and having sufficient knowledge of how to support their children best was mentioned as a motivator for engagement in literacy programmes with their children and independently during

the interviews. Parents mentioned continuous lifelong learning, some attending courses and training, and others striving to learn something new daily. One parent outlined how she has recently improved her skills to support her children best. Asyah, who speaks English as an additional language, explained that she has engaged in English classes at the local adult education centre, which she believes will help her support her children's learning in this English-speaking school. The importance of keeping up to date with what the children are learning in school was highlighted by parents. Amelia suggested that by being involved in school life and events such as these family literacy workshops, parents who have been "out of school a long time" learn new ways to teach their children and have opportunities to see the unique ways that their children are learning in school and how best that can be supported. She outlined that she "will always challenge" herself, and since finishing a course in a further education college recently, she has more time to be involved with her children's education both in school and outside. She offered to come into the school to get involved in shared reading opportunities with the children. Furthermore, she offered that her mother would also be interested in helping out, as they both feel that parent and family engagement benefits both the children and the parents. Similarly, Zerina explained to her children that "grown-ups don't know everything, we have to learn every day". The availability of classes and opportunities for parents in the area was outlined by Amelia and Asyah, with the latter recommending English classes in the local adult education centre for all parents who speak English as an additional language who are participating in the workshops. Clearly, these parents are motivated to engage in family literacy practices and programmes with their children and desire to develop their children's and their own skills.

5.2.2.4 Parenting Practices

The importance of encouraging children to have independence, confidence and freedom was an aspect of parenting mentioned during the three parent's interviews. Natalie, in particular, felt strongly about this in relation to her child with Down Syndrome. She outlined that her child "needs to be independent, I cannot do stuff for her all the time, and sometimes that's painful for me". Her parenting practices allow her children the freedom to make a mess, dress themselves and

organise themselves while also ensuring that boundaries and rules are in place, something she feels is important for their development. The importance of fostering independence in her children was also discussed by Asyah, who prioritises the development of these skills so that her children are ready for the future. Supporting and building their children's confidence was outlined by Yuna and Natalie, with the latter describing how she praises her children and rewards them for their efforts: "even the smallest thing...I'm always like, you did great... building her up". Robin and Yuna spoke about the value of developing resilience in their children and developing their ability to control their emotions. Yuna described the importance of her children learning to show and talk about their feelings, which she acknowledges is a "big skill", while Robin shared that she supports her child to have a "positive attitude about (his) day" in school. Natalie and Robin identified positive attitudes to school and education as a priority. The latter outlined that her son can often have a negative attitude towards school but that she and her husband encourage a "positive attitude about (your) day because it will make you feel better". Asyah, Yuna, Natalie and Robin prioritised the holistic development of their children. To summarise, parents who participated in these interviews reported that both their own 'person' characteristics and their child's 'person' characteristics can affect the success of the language and literacy activities that they engage in.

5.2.3 Home-School Relationships

The schedule for the pre-workshop interviews (see Appendix F) contained one section that focused solely on home-school relationships and sought to focus on the 'context' of the relationships between these families and this DEIS band 1 urban school. Parent responses were overwhelmingly positive (although it should be noted that this group of parents are self-selecting) in relation to pre-existing home-school relationships. Parents identified the characteristics of this positive home-school relationship and the welcoming environment that exists within their child's microsystem in this DEIS band 1 urban primary school. It is evident that strong connections exist in the mesosystem between the home and the school for these families, and these relationships allow for positive proximal processes to exist and develop. The participant's thoughts on these topics will be discussed

under the headings of home-school communication (section 5.2.3.1), parental engagement and involvement (section 5.2.3.2), and school supports for families (5.2.3.3).

All participants recognised the importance of the home and school relationship. Asyah outlined that due to the positive relationship between her and the school, she feels "relaxed" and "happy". The idea that "everyone is very approachable" was outlined by Tracey, who explained that on occasions that her extended family have visited the school, they have commented on the friendly and welcoming nature of the staff. Robin expressed that she finds it "amazing" that I, the HSCL, know all of the parent's names and call each parent by their first name daily, with or without face masks or make-up! The longstanding relationship that her family has with the school is outlined by Amelia, who explained that she is a past pupil of the school herself. Chana noted that she has a good relationship with the school, with Yuna stating that the school are very "proactive". Zerina commented that she knows that the staff are "there all the time" to support her and her family. Natalie stressed the strong relationship that she has with the staff, noting that "I can tell the truth, and they (the staff) will find a way to help me, or you know, will like find how to make things happen, and get help for me and for my children". She states that she has an "amazing, amazing relationship" with the staff, notably with her three children's teachers, the principal, and me, the HSCL. Furthermore, she feels respected, valued and "listened to" and knows she and her children can trust the school. Evidently, a strong connection exists between these parents and the school staff, providing a strong context for sharing information and developing new skills. This strong connection is supported by effective communication (see section 5.2.3.1), opportunities for parental engagement (see section 5.2.3.2) and school supports (see section 5.2.3.3).

5.2.3.1 Home-School Communication

All participants spoke positively about their communication with the school, particularly with their child's class teacher, highlighting that a strong connection with the school exists in the mesosystems of these families and children. The responses highlight the importance of two-way communication and building strong relationships between the home and the school. Asyah noted that all staff

she has encountered in the school have been helpful to her and communicate positively. She outlined that she primarily communicates with the school on a face-to-face basis. The idea of the class teacher approaching the parent if there is ever a problem was outlined by Natalie and Tracey, with the latter stating that the teacher approaches her "the minute she (the teacher) notices that there's anything up with him". Natalie acknowledged that "everybody is busy, and teachers are busy as well... so if you have five minutes for me, I can express my worries or kind of ask you for something that I need or talk about any problem". She stated that if she had a bigger issue, she would message the teacher on the class app (see below) and arrange a suitable meeting time.

Parents also highlighted the use of alternative methods of communication. Tracey mentioned the communicative journal the school uses for her child with additional needs, outlining how this helps gauge how her child's day went. She also acknowledged that the school send a written report about each child at the end of each school year, which helps decipher what work should be done over the summer with the children and ensures continuity of learning. Natalie spoke about how, during the COVID-19 lockdown, her child's teacher (when she was in Early Start) sent her videos and even face-timed her on a number of occasions. By far, the most common communication platform outlined was the school's app for home-school communication called *Class Dojo*, which was mentioned by seven of the eight parents interviewed. This app has a private messenger function for all parents to message the teacher and vice versa. It also has a 'class story' function whereby the teacher can post images of the children in school and send messages to the class as a whole. Zerina outlined that she uses a mixture of private messenger functions on the app and in-person conversations to communicate with the class teacher. Chana outlined that the app is a "reliable" way to communicate with the school. Robin noted that the app is an interactive way for her to communicate with the school, with Amelia echoing this and adding that the use of *Class Dojo* in the school "is just brilliant", in particular for keeping parents updated daily, as she acknowledges that there is only so much the teacher can tell each parent in person each day. The class story function, whereby the parents can see daily updates and pictures of their children in school, was praised highly by Yuna, who stated, "I feel like I'm with them (her children) every day with the pictures and the various

communications...sometimes after work, I just say, 'Oh let me check today's pictures!', It's just so cute". She elaborated on this by adding that she then uses these pictures to instigate conversations with her children about what happened at school that day and what they learned. It is apparent that all parents interviewed communicate positively with the school staff regularly in varying ways, including the school app (which they see as a constant and open form of communication), face-to-face interactions (which can help to build relationships) and additional communications when appropriate (including the communicative journal).

5.2.3.2 Parental Engagement and Involvement

Some parents discussed the importance of parental involvement in school and engagement in learning. The extent of engagement appeared to vary depending on a variety of factors, including language competence and time commitments (see section 5.2.4). Amelia has a history of involvement in the school, including volunteering, attending parent events, and partaking in the school's Parents Association. She acknowledged the importance of involvement in school life and stated, "I love being part of the school...I always tried to give my best for my kids". She outlined that she would like to get more involved now as she has fewer work commitments and acknowledged that she missed opportunities for engagement with her older children due to other commitments. She expressed that she would like to upskill as "there's new ways to teach and just new ways that they are learning". The importance of the school in her family's day-to-day life was also mentioned by Amelia when she stated that the school is "your child's place for eight years... it's a huge part of my life". Furthermore, she expressed the excitement in her house when she told her child that she would be coming to the school to partake in workshops with her, "she thinks it's great that mammy is going to school with her next Thursday". The importance of her children seeing her supporting their school and getting involved in activities was outlined by Yuna. She commented that it is essential that her children "feel like we are involved...just to see us as parents that are supporting, we are there". Chana remarked that when she was growing up in Nepal, there were no opportunities for parental involvement or engagement and that she believes that her involvement

in the school will allow her children to be “more motivated in school and be happy we are around, which is wonderful”. Notably, parental engagement in school life is a priority for the eight parents who partook in these interviews based on the comments they made and due to the fact that they agreed to partake in the workshops and the interviews.

5.2.3.3 School Supports for Families

A key theme that arose during the analysis was the presence of supports from the school for the parents and their families, as identified by parents. These supports range from social and emotional supports, to special educational needs supports, to family supports. Four parents outlined various support they and their families receive from the school staff. Tracey mentioned that she knew about varying emotional and social supports that the school offers as her children avail of some of them, including varying therapies and supports available for children with additional needs. She stated that she initially became aware of this information through the school brochure and website. Furthermore, she acknowledged that she is lucky to avail of such services as she is aware of long waiting lists and a lack of support, particularly for children with additional needs and those who have recently moved to the country. Natalie spoke about the support that the school provides, mentioning, in particular, the support that her child with additional needs current teacher in junior infants provides. The teacher shares resources, activities, and ideas with Natalie which help her to support her child’s learning at home, “she can practise at home... I appreciate that kind of help”, ensuring the transfer of skills learned in school to another element of the microsystem, the home. Due to her child's needs and also to the fact that the family are on the housing list in a number of areas in Dublin, Natalie fears that her children may have to move school in the future, something she said she dreads to think of as she believes that “she (her child) is getting the most help and I am getting the most help that we could ask for”. She outlined that the class teacher also supports her by implementing a reward system in school that outlines boundaries and rules and can be used at home. Natalie mentioned that the school staff also provide emotional support to her and “are always there”. Robin commented on how the staff in her child's class, namely the teacher and

SNA, supported her child's difficult transition to school, something she appreciated greatly. The sharing of resources, activities and ideas with parents was also mentioned by Zerina, who outlined that her child's class teacher gave her support and ideas around family literacy, phonics and pronunciation to support her child during the school year and the summer, thus supporting the proximal process of developing family literacy practices in the home. The provision of the HSCL in the school and the support that this provides was highlighted by parents, with Amelia stating that communication with the school is made easier through the HSCL. She also noted that "ye cater for everybody" as a school. Parents appeared content with the support they receive from the school for themselves and their families, again highlighting the strong relationships in their child's mesosystem.

The topic of transitions was explored, and ways in which children who are in Early Start and their parents could be best supported by the school when transitioning into junior infants was discussed briefly. This element of the child's macrotime signifies change and maturation, and in order to be successful, it needs the support of the school and the home. Parents of children in junior infants were asked how their child's transition went and any advice they could give the school on best supporting future transitions. Six of the eight parents reported that their child's transition was primarily positive, with Robin outlining that her child found the change "rough" as he was not prepared for the structure of the school day and Natalie stating that her child finds it difficult to form a relationship and develop trust with the teacher initially. Tracey described her son's transition as "a bit of a shock", elaborating by saying, "I think for some children, it's like all these new people that they don't know". However, she explained that the foundation he got in Early Start in the school and the friends he had made in that class made the transition into junior infants smoother for him than perhaps for other children who had not attended Early Start. Amelia expressed that her child's transition was "brilliant! Not one day did I see a tear... seamless" and acknowledged that the work that the HSCL did in advance of the children starting school in September was invaluable (open days, home visits, tours of the school, welcome packs, videos), as her daughter "knew the run of the place" when she started. Yuna's children all transitioned to the school this year as they have just moved to the area, which she reports has proved to be a very

positive experience due to the support she has received from the school. Evidently the strong connections in the mesosystem allowed for mostly positive transitions for these families and children. In summary, parent responses were overwhelmingly positive (although as stated previously it is important to note that this group of parents are self-selecting) in relation to pre-existing home-school relationships in this DEIS band 1 school. Parents identified the characteristics of this positive home-school relationship and the welcoming environment that exists within their child's microsystem in this primary school. It is evident that strong connections exist in the mesosystem between the home and the school for these families, and these relationships allow for positive proximal processes to exist and develop.

5.2.4 Barriers to Supporting Child Development

All participants were asked about various barriers they face as parents supporting their child's development and education, including barriers in relation to supporting learning at home, supporting their child's transition to school (where necessary) and their own confidence in supporting their children. This section will explore barriers regarding child 'person' factors (section 5.2.4.1), parent 'person' factors (section 5.2.4.2) and time (section 5.2.4.3).

5.2.4.1 Child 'Person' Factors

All participants outlined some child-related challenges they experience when attempting to engage in family literacy activities, considering Bronfenbrenner's dispositions, demand and resource characteristics, which influence and are influenced by the proximal process of family literacy. Child interest levels, child mood and child ability were factors that participants mentioned throughout the pre-workshop individual interviews.

Most participants referred to their child's interest and motivation levels as affecting their engagement in language and literacy practices. Natalie mentioned that engaging her daughter is "difficult because she's a little bored", while Asyah acknowledged that her children are "bored about everything" and that they "need change". Similarly, both Zerina and Chana outlined that their children "get bored easily", with Zerina stating that her daughter loses focus when partaking in

language and literacy tasks. Robin outlined that her child can often resist partaking in tasks that he sees as school-related, with Amelia stating that for her daughter, it's "the thoughts of doing it".

Another idea that four participants put forward was the effect of their child's mood on their task engagement. Tracey mentioned this a number of times in her interview, outlining the importance of monitoring her child's "humour" and energy levels, as well as gauging if anything has upset him throughout his day in school. Natalie explained that her daughter can be stubborn, and if she does not want to engage in something, it is challenging to get around her. She noted that to support her daughter, she needs boundaries and consistency. Yuna stated that her son often complains in the morning that he does not want to attend school, but once he arrives at the schoolyard and sees his friends, he is fine. Chana, Natalie and Tracey outlined the importance of allowing children time and space when they are not in the mood for engagement, with the latter stating that "some days we just sit".

When discussing their family literacy practices, their child's ability is important in determining the type of activities parents engage in. Natalie spoke about how her daughter's additional needs have impacted her engagement in the past, stating that before a number of interventions, her daughter's hearing and vision levels were a serious barrier to her learning. Amelia mirrored this, outlining, "before she got the glasses, she couldn't read letters properly, and obviously, I didn't know why she couldn't". The difficulties with communication that Zerina's younger son experiences due to his additional needs make it difficult for her to engage in some activities with him. Chana shared that her child has difficulty with pencil grip, making written tasks difficult for him. Tracey outlined that she finds it difficult to gauge her son in junior infants reading level and ways to support him as he is an entirely different learner from his older brother. For the parents interviewed, it is apparent that their children's motivation and interest levels, ability and mood can sometimes prevent them from engaging in family literacy practices.

Parent's other children sometimes acted as a barrier to engagement in family literacy activities with their children in Early Start and junior infants. Natalie, Tracey and Zerina have children with additional needs and discussed the challenges around supporting their children with additional needs and their

siblings. Tracey acknowledged that her son's (who is in junior infants) mood is often determined by his older brother's behaviour, which she adds is often "the case of a sibling of a child with special needs". Zerina and Tracey both spoke about the difficulties in finding the time to engage in learning activities with their children in junior infants as their children with additional needs often require the most attention, with Tracey stating that "it's hard to give him (her child in junior infants) the time he needs". Natalie mentioned that two of her children are on a waiting list for Speech and Language services and that she struggles to support them at home. In summary, child 'person' factors can inhibit engagement in language and literacy activities and development in the homes of these families from time to time.

5.2.4.2 Parent 'Person' Factors

The participants outlined a number of barriers that they face themselves in relation to supporting their child's language and literacy development, including differences in parenting styles in the home, parent mood, language barriers and parent knowledge, considering Bronfenbrenner's dispositions, demand and resource characteristics which influence and are influenced by the proximal process of family literacy.

Differences in parenting techniques between parents was mentioned as a challenge by two parents. Natalie stated that her husband can be a bit of a "distraction" to her children as he does not implement the same boundaries and routines with the children, particularly boundaries around access to technology and tablets, which Natalie feels strongly about. Chana noted that she and her husband have their "own styles" with the children and do different tasks with them. In relation to parent mood, Natalie acknowledged that she is "trying (my) best. I have days where I want to close the door too".

Chana, Yuna and Asyah discussed language barriers they encounter as parents when supporting their children in their education, as English is not their first language. Asyah stated that she finds it difficult to translate some words from her first language to English, even though she has taken English language classes. Yuna outlined that she had never heard a word that her child learned in school recently. Chana relies on her older daughter (who is in first class) to help

her with her English when supporting her son in junior infants, stating, "sometimes even I ask her because she knows more perfectly than I do!".

Parent knowledge as a barrier to supporting their child's development was recognised by six of the eight participants, by both those who speak English as their first language and those who speak English as an additional language. Asyah outlined that she needs to learn more skills to support her children best, outlining that "it's very hard" at times. Having English as a second language adds difficulties for Chana when supporting her children's learning. A lack of specific knowledge on her child's reading level is a challenge for Tracey, who stated, "I'm not sure how much he needs to know". Amelia outlined the Irish language as a specific worry, as she believes that she has a poor level of Irish and that this will inhibit her from supporting her child's language learning. Robin admitted that she doesn't know "how schools work" as her child in junior infants is her oldest child and first to attend the Irish school system. Zerina feels she can navigate the learning at this stage but that "in the future, maybe more difficult and then I might need the teacher's help". These parents report that factors such as varying parenting styles in the home, parent mood, language barriers and parent knowledge can act as barriers to supporting their children's language and literacy development, all of which were considered in the development and implementation of the workshops.

5.2.4.3 Time as a Barrier

This research shows that time is a common factor inhibiting engagement in family literacy practices. During the interviews, parents described the impact of micro, meso and macrotime on developing the proximal process of family literacy. Microtime and mesotime factors included daily and weekly commitments that families have to juggle in the context of the home that inhibit regular and frequent engagement in family literacy activities. Macrotime considerations included transitions and the timeframe of COVID-19.

Six of the eight parents spoke about time barriers they face when juggling various aspects of family life. Tracey, who lives about a 45-minute commute from the school, acknowledged that she "can be waiting ages on the bus" and that by the time she and her two sons get home, have dinner and do homework, their

family learning time can be limited. Natalie spoke about how making time for family learning is difficult as she has three children under eight. Amelia, Robin, Chana and Yuna outlined the difficulties of juggling work and family time. Robin reads with her son before work (and school) and tries to "give him (her son) concentrated time", which is scheduled around her and her husband's work schedules. Natalie, Tracey, Yuna and Robin mentioned that cooking, cleaning and general housework often hinder family learning time in their homes.

The COVID-19 lockdowns were mentioned as a barrier to development and engagement by four of the eight parents who participated in the pre-workshop interviews. Amelia and Tracey spoke about the social opportunities the children missed during the COVID lockdowns. Amelia stated, "they didn't see anyone, they didn't go anywhere," and Tracey outlined that "social interactions I know were impossible". Zerina discussed the difficulties of engaging and entertaining her children during the COVID-19 lockdown as they were "stuck inside". Natalie mentioned how, after the lockdown, "the school was a different place".

Challenges that the participants and their families faced in relation to times of transition were mentioned by three participants. Yuna and her family have only moved to the area in the past year. Although they have settled well, there are "a lot of things that we are still trying". Robin's child's transition to school from preschool was "tough" as her child is a "creature of habit" who faced difficulties transitioning into a new routine. Natalie acknowledged that transitioning to a new class and teacher each year is especially difficult for her daughter, who has additional needs, as it takes her longer to adjust to a new teacher and a new routine. It can be noted that various time constraints influence the level of engagement in family literacy activities in the homes of the parents interviewed. To conclude, all eight parents who were interviewed were asked about various barriers they face as parents supporting their child's development and education, including barriers in relation to supporting learning at home, supporting their child's transition to school (where necessary) and their own confidence in supporting their children. All parents named various barriers which can inhibit them from time to time.

5.2.5 Conclusion

The findings from the eight pre-workshop semi-structured interviews conducted with parents in May 2022, as outlined in section 5.2, aim to address research questions 1 and 2 and focus on the family literacy practices of the families who engaged in the interviews. Section 5.2 delves into the proximal process of existing and developing family literacy practices, considering the 'person' characteristics of both the child and the parent engaging in the process. Pre-existing home-school relationships are outlined, and this context is explored with parents who participated. Barriers to engagement and development are presented. Parents expressed their wishes for what they may gain from attending this set of tailored family literacy workshops, all of which were considered as the process developed.

The findings outlined in this section explore the rich pre-existing practices that these families engage in and the importance placed on literacy development in the homes of these families. All parents are motivated to support their children's language and literacy development and engage in regular practices to do so. All parents interviewed reported some confidence and experience in supporting their children's language and literacy development but were open to and welcoming of the opportunity to engage in this set of family literacy workshops, which they hoped would provide learning and social benefits for them, their children, and their families. Parents reported that strong home-school relationships exist in the context of this DEIS school and that the school makes various efforts to ensure that two-way communication is prioritised. These interviews took place before the workshops began, and all eight parents were invited to engage in post-workshop interviews when the workshops finished (six of which did re-interview). The findings from these post-workshop interviews will be outlined in section 5.3.

5.3 Post-Workshop Interview Findings

The workshops took place in May and June 2022, with twenty-eight families engaging in the four-week programme (see 'action' phase of the AR cycle for details, section 4.3). Fourteen parents agreed to participate in the post-workshop semi-structured interviews, which took place in June 2022 (see section 4.4.2.2 for

participant profiles). Six of these fourteen parents had participated in the pre-workshop interviews; eight had not. All parents who participated in the family literacy workshops were invited to partake in a post-workshop interview. These interviews aimed to address all three research questions briefly, with a particular emphasis on question 3, discussing in detail these parent's experiences of engaging in the family literacy workshops as a tool for gathering data for the reflection and evaluation phases of the action research. The interview schedule also touched on parental confidence around supporting literacy and language development in the home, parent's thoughts on home-school relationships and communication and barriers that parents identified that may affect their ability to support their children. Although not directly asked about them, some parents spoke about pre-existing literacy and language practices in their homes before the workshops. The semi-structured interviews were based on an interview schedule (see Appendix G).

Section 5.3 outlines the findings from the semi-structured interviews which took place after the family literacy workshops. The fourteen post-workshop interviews have been analysed thematically considering Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model and emerging themes are outlined in section 5.3. Section 5.3.1 examines pre-existing conditions outlined by parents which supported the success of the family literacy programme, including 'person' and 'context' factors. The workshop process is outlined in section 5.3.2, whereby the outcomes achieved by the parents, children and families are explored, as are motivations for engaging in the workshops. Characteristics for successful workshops are also discussed in section 5.3.2. The post-workshop interview analysis concludes with barriers to engagement (section 5.3.3).

In brief, all parents interviewed post-workshop identified that this tailored family literacy programme was a success. Benefits were numerous for parents, children, families and the school. Parents reported that they are engaged in their children's language and literacy development and are highly motivated to support their children. Parental confidence increased during this workshop process. The already positive home-school relationships strengthened and parents enjoyed the experience. The following sections will outline the above findings in greater detail and introduce other positive findings.

5.3.1 Necessary Conditions for Successful Family Learning

Parents identified pre-existing conditions in relation to 'person' characteristics, 'context' and practices that they engaged in prior to these workshops. These factors paved the way for this successful family literacy programme and are outlined in the following sections.

5.3.1.1 Pre-Existing 'Person' Characteristics

Parent's pre-existing demand, resource and force characteristics seem to have influenced the success of the development of the proximal process of family literacy, as is the focus of this research. Parents were asked about their confidence in supporting their child's language and literacy development, and answers varied, with some parents outlining that they did not feel confident in this area and others outlining that they did.

Those who outlined that they were confident in supporting their child's development before engaging in the workshops noted that they felt confident as they believed they had the resources and knowledge to support their child's development. Vedran explained that he and his wife "feel that we have the knowledge" and are confident that they are doing enough to push their child ahead academically to meet their "high expectations". Chloe noted that "everything that she (her daughter) knows, I taught her" and that her daughter is "well ahead" in school due to the work that Chloe has put into her, including buying physical resources (such as toys and writing resources) to challenge her academically since she was young. The idea of gaining confidence from rearing her oldest daughters was outlined by Amelia, who noted that she has experienced junior infants twice already with her older children and is confident that she knows how to support her youngest after what she has learned previously. Other parents, namely Agung, Kofi, Eva and Abebi, outlined that they do not feel confident in supporting their children's language and literacy development due to reasons such as a lack of knowledge and education and language barriers due to speaking English as an additional language (see section 5.3.3 on barriers). Thirteen of the fourteen parents outlined that their confidence in supporting their children improved since they began attending the family literacy workshops (see section 5.3.2.2.1). Evidently, parents deem their pre-

existing 'person' characteristics as an important factor in the success of family literacy.

5.3.1.2 Pre-Existing Home-School Relationships

Parents were asked about their thoughts and opinions on pre-existing home-school relationships, with the results being overwhelmingly positive. Parents identified the characteristics of this positive home-school relationship and the welcoming environment within their child's microsystem. Echoing the thoughts of the PEG and the pre-workshop interview participants, these parents reported that strong connections exist in the mesosystem between the home and the school for these families, and these relationships allow for positive proximal processes to develop, as is the case for this research. This research built on these positive relationships which resulted in the parents, children, and families who participated all experienced positive outcomes.

Parent responses were positive when asked about their opinions on the support provided by the school. All parents reported that they are happy with the support that they receive and could not think of any other supports that could be beneficial, with Tracey stating, "no, I think you already do loads for us". Asyah noted that since her children started in the school three years ago, she has attended many of the parent classes and courses run by the school, including induction meetings for parents of junior infant children, and has benefitted from them. The idea of the "personal experience" that the school provides was mentioned by Robin, who noted that she had "never seen a school that went that kind of distance for kids and parents" and appreciated that the teachers who greet her family in the morning make a conscious effort to greet them by name and engage in a short discussion, something which makes her feel valued and respected. She noted that this "makes you want to be involved... everyone is very supportive here" and encouraged her to join the parent's workshops and participate in the pre and post-workshop interviews. Natalie outlined that she feels that all staff, including the ancillary staff such as the school caretaker, are trustworthy, making her feel like the school is a "safe place". Agung noted that he is confident that he will receive support if needed and stated, "I know I could ask you anything... If we ever need help, we will ask". Abebi, whose oldest child in

junior infants has a diagnosis of Autism, praised the support offered by the school, in particular by the HSCL, stating,

"Sometimes I feel like I am on my own with the boys, but the school help me 100%, and you always say to me "if you need help, just call me", and I'll call you, and I know I'm happy and I know that if I want help, I can call you... I'm very lucky to have people like you because this is not in every school. Like you have time to talk to me each morning and to speak to me, so I'm very grateful for that".

She added that she is "struggling with (her) education" but enjoys engaging with the school to see what the teachers are doing to support her children in school, and that she attempts to practise these skills and activities at home. Kaylee, whose partner is from Nigeria, mentioned the support for children from varying nationalities, stating that her daughter was looking forward to the school's celebrations for International Day in the coming weeks and looked forward to wearing her traditional dress from her dad's home country. She elaborated by praising the school for their efforts to organise events for dads as well as mums, as her partner is the current captain of the school's dad's football team. Chloe explained that her friend's children go to a neighbouring school, and she claimed that greater support was provided by the school in which the research is set, stating, "they're not allowed to go to anything down there (in the neighbouring school) ... they have nothing like this (the workshops)". She added that she feels that parents are responsible for supporting the school when they attempt to run courses and initiatives like this, stating "it's important that we are here, and you need people to come in too".

All parents spoke about the communication between home and school and the positive relationship that they and their families have with the school and the teacher. Kofi acknowledged, "I like what the school is doing to involve parents in the education system...the teachers are truly amazing". Two of the parents, Amelia and Chloe are past pupils of the school and noted that they and their families have always had a strong relationship with the school, with Chloe stating, "I love coming into this school". The idea of the school being "open" was put forward by Eva, who appreciated that she could talk to the teachers and the

principal every day if she needed to, a thought that Robin echoed. Amelia named the HSCL as a supportive role and noted that the HSCL facilitates clear and effective communication between staff and parents. She acknowledged that this was not always the case in schools and that teachers were "daunting and stern" in the past, something she is glad has changed. When speaking about home-school communication, Yuna noted that it is important for parties on "both sides of the bridge" (i.e. the home and the school) to do their best to "see what we can do to improve". In conclusion, the relationship between the home and the school is deemed important by all parents, with all acknowledging their strong relationships with their child's school.

5.3.1.3 Family Literacy

Although not directly asked about pre-existing literacy practices, some parents interviewed spoke about the literacy practices they engaged in with their families before attending the family literacy workshops. Parents spoke about practices which they found beneficial to their child's development. Reading in the home was mentioned by the majority of parents, with most parents noting that their children enjoy reading. Kofi outlined that his daughter "really likes reading books", while Robin noted that her son "is a very big fan of books". Similar to practices in the homes of the PEG and the pre-workshop interview participants, reading takes place in the evenings in most of the participant's houses, with Eva outlining that designated reading time in her house is "usually before bed" and Kaylee noting that they try to "squeeze in a few minutes" most nights. Eva, Yuna and Natalie mentioned that they sometimes encourage their older children, who are more accomplished readers, to read with their younger children.

Some parents outlined specific activities they engage in while reading with their children. Vedran, who explained that he tries his best to push his daughter to "get ahead", outlined that he encourages his daughter to participate in activities using word boxes every night before bed whereby he picks ten to fifteen new words from the books that his daughter is reading and focuses on his daughter learning how to read these words "from memory" for the week. The use of technology to support literacy development was described by Chloe, who noted that she encourages her child to watch videos of story time on her tablet,

an idea she got from her child's previous teacher in Early Start. Tracey mentioned that she uses the educational website called *Twinkl* to download literacy resources for her children. For dual language learners, Agung, whose family speak Nepali as their first language, reads books with his child in English for two reasons: firstly, he finds it very difficult to source Nepali books, and secondly, his daughter has not learned to read in Nepali yet. Amira echoed this and explained that she reads to her daughter in English at home.

Two parents explained that they were members of the library prior to the family literacy session in the library. Chloe noted that she has been a member of the local library since she was a child and visits the library with her child "quite frequently". Tracey noted that she is a member of the library closer to her house and that she visits it once every two weeks with her children to change their books.

Pre-existing language activities were mentioned notably less than literacy activities. Amelia and Robin both noted that they encourage their children to speak about their day in school, with Robin stating that she uses the pictures the teacher posts on the class app to elicit talking about the day's events. In summary, parents identified pre-existing conditions in relation to 'person' characteristics, 'context' and practices that they engaged in prior to these workshops. These factors paved the way for this successful family literacy programme. As outlined above, some pre-existing literacy and language practices were noted by some of the parents interviewed; however, the main focus of the interviews was to discuss the family literacy programme that the parents and their children engaged in, and what benefits they reaped from engaging in the process, all of which will be outlined in the next section.

5.3.2 Workshop Findings

As outlined, one of the primary purposes of the post-workshop interviews was to get feedback from the participating parents on whether the PEG-designed family literacy workshops benefited the proximal process of developing family literacy practices. Other factors were also considered, such as 'person' characteristics, including developing parent confidence in supporting their children, developing

resource characteristics and home-school relationships. Following the analysis of the interviews, the following themes emerged:

- Parent 'person' motivations for attending the workshops
- Parent, child and family benefits and outcomes from attending the workshops
- Characteristics of successful family literacy programmes as identified by parents
- Parents thoughts on the future of family literacy in the school context

5.3.2.1 Parent 'Person' Motivations

All parents who were interviewed were highly motivated to support their family's language and literacy practices. Motivations for engaging in the workshops varied among parents, with social reasons being outlined such as spending one-on-one time with their children, building relationships with the school, showing their children that their education is prioritised, and meeting others emerging as the top motivations for engagement in the workshop sessions. As noted above, six of the fourteen parents who participated in these post-workshop interviews had already participated in the pre-workshop interviews. When they were asked again in the post-workshops interview what motivated them to join the workshops, some repeated what they had said above in section 5.2, and some added more detail.

Spending quality time with their children during the workshops was a motivation outlined by Kofi, Chloe, Vedran, Kaylee, Tracey, Abebi and Natalie. For Natalie, she aimed to enjoy the time with her daughter who has additional needs and as she finds it difficult to get one-on-one time at home with her, a thought that she shared in her pre-workshop interview also. This was echoed by both Abebi and Tracey, who noted that they both often feel as though their sons in junior infants do not get enough one-on-one time with them due to their other family commitments (both parents have a child with additional needs) and aimed to use this time to their advantage. Vedran, who works long hours, noted that this opportunity to engage in the classes would allow him to designate some time to bond with his daughter. Chloe noted that her mother attended events when she

was in school as a child and that she benefited from this time with her mother, so she aimed to replicate this for her daughter and to have opportunities in the school to "encourage her and to tell her she's doing good".

Building relationships with the school was deemed an important motivation for engagement in the family literacy workshops. Kofi outlined that it is important that his children see that he has a strong relationship with the school, noting "I want my child to feel that, you know, the parents and the teacher have a good relationship". Natalie and Yuna both echoed this, noting that building a relationship with the school is advantageous for many reasons, including having the opportunity to share ideas and communicate with the teachers and to show their children that a close relationship with the school is a positive. The idea of attending the workshops to show their children that their education is important to them as a family was outlined by Chloe, who stated that "it's important to come in and let her know that we are willing to come in for her and do something for her in school". Yuna echoed this and noted that it was important to her that her children felt that she was "involved in their studies" and were "a bit proud of that". Kaylee stated that both she and her child's father "think that school is very important" and that they wanted to show their daughter this by attending these workshops.

Personal motivations, such as meeting other parents and teachers, were another motivation noted by several parents during their post-workshop interviews, with some parents reporting that they simply wished to get some time outside of the home with other adults. Robin stated that one of the top reasons she joined the workshops was "to know some of the mothers and fathers". Similarly, Agung, Amira, Abebi and Natalie noted that they wanted to use the workshops to get to know other parents and children in their children's classes, with Agung outlining that he aimed to have "more interaction" with other parents in his daughter's class. Other motivations for joining the workshops included experiencing something new with their children, helping them bond with other children in their classes and helping to prepare their children for school-related challenges.

Two parents outlined motivation for broader engagement with their children's learning. Kofi expressed his motivations towards prioritising education and literacy at all times in the home, which he states is fuelled by his own past and lack of formal education, "I want my kids to reach where I could not reach".

This thought was also expressed by Abebi, who stated, "for me, education's really important for them because I didn't go to school and it's really hard like I don't want them to be like me, I just want them to do greater than me and do better you know?". Asyah, who has attended numerous English classes and continues to do so, noted that her motivation for learning English is to support her children's learning and education best. To conclude, all parents interviewed noted motivations for engaging in the family literacy workshops and other activities and initiatives to support their children's language and literacy development.

5.3.2.2 Outcomes

All parents interviewed outlined numerous positive outcomes that they, their children and broader families experienced from engaging in workshops, all of which are outlined in the following sections.

5.3.2.2.1 Parent Outcomes

All parents interviewed outlined how they benefited personally from attending the workshops, ranging from upskilling, building relationships, building confidence and enjoying the experience. Four parents identified the workshops as an opportunity to upskill and gain new resources to help their children. Kofi admitted that he is not an experienced baker but learned skills from the 'Literacy in the Kitchen' session to develop his baking ability. Eva noted that by attending the workshops, she learned a number of new skills and enjoyed practising them with her children. Many parents, including Kofi, admitted that prior to these sessions they did not know where the library was located and that they had never visited it before, "I never knew that there was a library there". Two also described that they benefited from having the opportunity to view their children in the school environment. Agung noted this, saying, "I enjoyed everything, and she is learning, and I can see also what she's doing inside the school and know exactly what's going on when I'm here; it's more clear". Robin echoed this by noting that it was interesting for her to view her son interacting with others in a different environment to the home.

As outlined in the previous section on motivations, the idea of building stronger relationships between the home and the school was a motivator for

engagement and was also outlined as a benefit to partaking in the workshops by parents interviewed. All parents noted that their already positive relationship with the school community had improved since they began attending the weekly workshops with their children. Chloe suggested that it "was cool to be included and to see what the inside of the school is like now". Parents also reported an improvement in their relationship with other parents in the school after attending the workshops, with many outlining that they had met new parents that they had not known before and learned some new names due to the increased interaction during the workshops. The idea of mixing with parents and children from other classes was seen as a benefit to parents, as outlined by Chloe, "I just liked everything about it. I just thought it was important, and it was nice to come in and even mix with other parents... like for us to do something nice together with the kids". Two parents, Natalie and Eva, who do not work outside the home, noted that they enjoyed spending time outside the home with Eva explaining that she enjoyed "spending time with the kids, learning something new, meeting someone new and spending time in a different environment". Finally, all parents outlined that their confidence benefitted, and they enjoyed the workshops. Parents clearly outlined numerous personal benefits they identified after engaging in the family literacy workshops with their children.

5.3.2.2.2 Family Outcomes

All parents reported that the family literacy workshops benefitted their children and families as a whole and that both they and their children enjoyed the workshops. Many barriers parents outlined as inhibiting or decreasing family literacy time were addressed (as outlined in section 5.3.3) when parents spoke of the benefits of engaging in the family literacy workshops.

One of the most common benefits was that the workshops allowed for genuine quality family time between the parents and their children and paved the way for more opportunities like this to be recreated in the home. Kofi acknowledged that the workshops "showed how the family can work together... and showed how to create some time together in the household". Yuna, who engaged in the workshops with her two sons simultaneously, noted that the relationship between her sons had improved and that they had learned how to

share and bond during the sessions. Vedran, who named time management and work commitments as a barrier to family time, outlined that these workshops allowed a change to routine and provided "easy time together". Robin also named work commitments as a barrier to family learning opportunities and explained that her son's delight to be "doing something as a family... pulls your heartstrings". Both Tracey and Abebi, who have sons with additional needs in the school, outlined that they enjoyed partaking in the workshops with their other children and that this benefitted the dynamics of the whole family, as they find it challenging to find time to engage on a one to one basis with their children in the home. It is evident that the family unit as a whole benefitted from parents and children engaging in these workshops.

5.3.2.2.1 Family Literacy Outcomes

Specific benefits to family literacy and learning opportunities were outlined, including positive outcomes concerning the proximal process of developing family literacy practices within these families, which parents explicitly named. Agung noted that the workshops taught him to put more structure on the family reading sessions at home and provided him with ideas that he can use with his child when reading to improve their engagement in family learning opportunities, an idea which was noted by Tracey and Abebi also. Kaylee echoed this, explaining that the ideas that she got in the sessions "gave her (her daughter) a sense of direction". She went on to explain that she has implemented some of the ideas in the home, which have benefitted the family in terms of literacy development. The benefit of the library card to the family was outlined by Asyah, who has taken out books in Arabic and English for both herself and her children for their holidays, and Kofi and Abebi echoed this idea. Eva noted that she avoided baking in the past with her children. However, using some of the tips she learned to keep her children engaged in the activity, she now feels that literacy and learning activities in the home are easier to control, while also being more enjoyable, stating, "we are enjoying this time together now". Family baking opportunities have arisen since the "Literacy in the Kitchen" session in many homes, with Amelia, Kaylee, Kofi, Eva and Abebi all describing their family baking time as a positive experience and something they are interested in doing again in the home. Amira

explained that she believes that both her and her daughter's English language benefitted from engaging in the sessions and communicating as best they could with other attendees in English while appreciating the support of Asyah, a member of the PEG and a parent of a child in Early Start, who led the workshops in Arabic (see section 5.3.2.3.3). Key outcomes reported by parents in relation to family literacy include learning ways to structure future activities while ensuring that activities are fun and engaging for their children. They also outlined that they learned ways to encourage everyday opportunities for family literacy practices. Evidently, family literacy practices within the homes of these families were enriched from participating in these workshops.

5.3.2.2.3 Child Outcomes

Child benefits such as enjoyment, increased engagement and learning, and an increase in confidence were reported by parents. All parents reported that their child gained from attending the workshops and enjoyed them, with Eva outlining, "I know he (her son) loved the time". Parents reported that the sessions caused excitement in their homes and that their children looked forward to their parents coming into the school for the sessions, with Robin noting "he would get excited the night before every one of the sessions and he would be excited to see us in the school". Kaylee explained that her daughter had been reluctant to come to school in the mornings previous to the workshops but that this experience had supported her child in settling into a routine and enjoying school outlining, "remember a few weeks ago, she was kind of a bit upset coming in and I think the workshops happened and then it kind of made it easier for her to come in, she knew there was something to look forward to". This outcome emphasises the importance of strong home-school relationships and ensuring that the context of the home and school are aligned experientially, particularly in the child's mind. The majority of parents reported that their children were happy to see them getting involved in school activities and building relationships with the school, with Chloe stating, "she loved me coming in for her...she was looking around on the first day to see if she could see me...she knew she was important". Amelia outlined that she believes it is a "little achievement for them to have their parents in school, it's brilliant", with Yuna echoing this by stating, "they're a little bit proud,

and they think, 'oh my parents are in my life in school and are involved in my study'".

Parents also reported the development of their child's 'person' characteristics, namely an increase in their child's confidence due to the workshop sessions. Both Agung and Chloe reported an improvement in their child's confidence around other children and adults, with the latter commenting on her daughter's ability to engage and participate in the sessions with such a big crowd present, with Chloe stating, "obviously, that (the workshops) built her confidence, she didn't seem shy or anything and answered a bunch of questions". Tracey noted that her son benefitted from the one-on-one time that they enjoyed during the workshops and that their relationship and his confidence in speaking to her about things that he is worried about improved, outlining, "he wouldn't really have been the type to tell you like if he's afraid, but now he seems more willing... and that's really nice". Parents also mentioned that they believe their children benefitted from mixing with other children outside of their classes at the workshops, particularly the Early Start children mixing with the older children in junior infants, "they're getting to know a few little faces for next year".

The idea that their children's literacy skills benefitted as a result of the sessions was outlined by Asyah, Yuna and Agung, with the latter noting that his daughter is responding better to questioning during reading time, which they engage in regularly due to the workshops. Parents also reported that their children gained valuable knowledge and skills from attending the workshops. Kaylee explained that her daughter learned something that she considered very important to her family due to the workshops. When visiting the library, Kaylee's daughter found a book about Rosa Parks, which explained the Civil Rights Movement in America in the 1950s and 1960s in a child-friendly way. She noted that this sparked an important conversation for her family about their culture and history and that her daughter benefitted from this experience and knowledge. Amelia observed that her daughter now sees learning opportunities in new environments in the world after partaking in the workshops, something which she believes has been beneficial to her daughter academically, "just even when she's pottering down the road now, and she's just picking up little things and telling me about them and that's something she would never have done before now, so I think she benefited in that way". Asyah reported an improvement in her son's

behaviour and believes that it is a result of the workshops, which taught both her and her son some routines that they could use at home, allowing for more structured and engaging family literacy time now. To conclude, all parents noted that they and their children who attended the workshops and, in some cases, their other children benefited in some way from attending the family literacy workshops.

5.3.2.3 Characteristics of Successful Family Literacy Programmes

Parents outlined the elements of this series of family literacy workshops, which they found most beneficial in terms of content and resources. Practical considerations were outlined by parents, including aspects of this successful family literacy programme which allowed for optimal engagement from parents, children and families, all of which will be outlined in the following sections.

5.3.2.3.1 Effective Workshop Features

Parents outlined numerous effective workshop features and identified their favourite workshop. Answers varied, with some parents mentioning that they enjoyed all the sessions and some choosing one in particular as their favourite. Parents outlined characteristics of their favourite sessions and named specific elements of the sessions they enjoyed the most and found most useful for them personally, their children and their families.

Two parents, Eva and Robin, chose the first session, 'Literacy in the Environment', as their favourite workshop, with Robin outlining that she enjoyed seeing her child in an environment that she usually did not get to see him in, interacting and playing with his friends while completing the activity with her. The idea of learning new activities and games that she can play with her children while on holiday in her native Poland during the summer was mentioned by Eva, who outlined, "I have learned something new, things which I can do with my children when I am in the village". These parents reported that the flexibility of the games and the ease of adaptation and implementation was key to the success of this workshop.

Natalie, Amelia, Abebi and Amira enjoyed 'Literacy in the Kitchen' and found it the most beneficial of the four workshops. The idea of the baking as

being the most transferable workshop activity was outlined by Natalie, who noted that she had easily implemented many of this workshop's ideas into her everyday life since she attended the session. Amelia and Abebi stated that previously, they had rarely done baking activities at home with their children but enjoyed the session and saw how easy it was to do this at home. They outlined that they intend to bake more regularly with their children and will place a focus on literacy while doing so after attending this session.

Chloe, Agung, Tracey and Yuna chose the 'Shared Reading' session in the school as their favourite workshop. Chloe stated that she and her daughter enjoyed the various ideas around questioning and story sequencing covered in the session while also having fun together. Agung noted that he learned new activities and ideas about reading in the home from attending this session. He and his daughter enjoyed this session also, and he outlined that he had seen a notable improvement in his daughter's reading since they began implementing some of the ideas at home that they learned in the session. Similarly, Yuna enjoyed this session as she learned some tips on how best to utilise reading time at home, and most importantly, she learned the importance of organisation when it comes to structuring activities for the children. The idea of the 'Shared Reading' workshop being the most engaging was noted by Tracey, who outlined that this workshop was "more interactive than what we do at home like we wouldn't have had those resources; he was so excited by the little puppets".

Four parents, Kofi, Vedran, Kaylee and Asyah, favoured the library session. Kofi outlined, "I benefitted the most from this one, I never knew there was a library there", while Vedran noted that the library was "something new for the kids, they're not used to that". The main reason that Asyah chose the library as her favourite was that she felt her child was most engaged in this session and got "energy for the reading" after he partook in the shared reading experience in the library. Kaylee noted that the trip to the library had many benefits for her and her family, including that her child chose a book about Rosa Parks, something which meant a lot to her dad, who is of African origin.

The fourteen parents outlined their favourite family literacy workshop and why they chose it. No one workshop stood out as being the most favoured, and some parents noted that they found all sessions beneficial. The characteristics of a good session appear to be common according to parents. Flexibility and

adaptability of resources and activities was mentioned as a benefit to all sessions. The ease of implementing activities and ideas was identified as important, as was the fun and engaging element of all sessions. The idea of opening possibilities for learning in the outside world was highlighted by parents, and activities which were easily transferable were favoured. Organisation was outlined as important, as was providing engaging learning opportunities for children. The 'Literacy in the Environment' session and the 'Literacy in the Kitchen' session were favoured by many as they offered opportunities for families to engage in practices in their daily lives and real work outside of formal literacy time. The 'Shared Reading' session and the 'Library Visit' provided a more structured literacy-based approach and offered ideas on ensuring that these literacy activities are fun and engaging. Clearly, parents reported positive attitudes towards all four family literacy workshops and enjoyed them.

5.3.2.3.2 Workshop Resources

All parents shared that they found the resources they received at the workshops were effective and useful (see appendices for resources). Similar to their descriptions of the most effective workshop sessions, the favoured workshop resources were deemed to be well-structured, flexible and adaptable. According to parents, the session which provided the most useful resources was the 'Shared Reading' session, with twelve of the fourteen parents outlining that they have used the resources from this session at home with their children. The resources included a copy of the book "We're Going on a Bear Hunt" (printed in English; however, Asyah, who facilitated the sessions in Arabic translated and printed an Arabic version for Arabic-speaking parents, see Appendix P), a set of sequencing cards, a set of character lollipop stick puppets, a sheet outlining games and activities that could be done around the book (all of which were modelled during the session) and a QR code with a link to an online reading of the book (see appendices).

All parents who did not previously have a library card signed up to receive one during the visit to the library. Eleven parents noted that they have used or plan to use the library since receiving their card. Those who had yet to visit the library outside of the workshops at the time of the interview explained that they

planned to visit with their children during the summer holidays. The eight parents who had visited the library since the family literacy sessions described how they had taken out books both for themselves and for their children. Abebi shared that she had borrowed a book to help her study for her driver theory test and borrowed books in Irish and French to encourage her children's development of foreign languages, something she feels will greatly benefit her children in the future. Asyah explained that she had taken a parenting book out of the library to help her learn how to encourage her youngest child to engage in his learning. Kaylee mentioned that she had used her new library card to visit the library with her daughter for a Lego workshop since joining and planned on signing up for more workshops in the future.

Parents acknowledged that they also used some of the resources gained in the 'Literacy in the Environment' session. Kofi shared that his family now often play 'Simon Says' while out and about in the local community, something which his children enjoy. Amelia noted that she often utilises oral retelling while on walks with her daughter now "to keep her busy as she's walking". Yuna added that she uses some ideas that she learned in the first session around eliciting vocabulary from her children while on walks, "I just really liked the park one as well, especially now they're developing, you know, like vocabulary and language, by asking them things like, what do you see? What's the shape?". Eva noted that she intends to use the scavenger hunt template while on holiday in Poland over the summer.

Resources from the 'Literacy in the Kitchen' session were also mentioned. Amelia noted that her daughter has made literacy cookies for her family and that they are much easier than Rice Krispy cakes to make! Kaylee stated that due to the pictorial nature of the resources from this session, her daughter has gained independence around baking and can prepare for baking cookies by herself using the workshop resources. In conclusion, all parents noted that they have used some resources from at least one of the family literacy sessions since attending the workshops. Resources have been described as easy to use and beneficial for family literacy activities. Parents outlined that workshop resources are being used in the home and are transferable outside the structured literacy workshops. Evidently, the resources that parents received from attending the workshops have been effective, useful and beneficial for both them and their children.

5.3.2.3.3 Enablers for Parent Engagement and Success

All parents were asked about the practicalities of attending the workshops and identified several enablers that were provided to ensure maximum participation and success of the family literacy programme.

The facilitation of childcare was an issue that Amira, Kaylee and Abebi outlined. Before the family literacy workshops began, it was explained to all participants that younger siblings were welcome to attend the workshops to make attendance easier for parents. Amira brought her youngest child to all the workshops and noted that this worked best for her. Although bringing their children with them was an option, Kaylee and Abebi attempted to make alternative arrangements for their younger children to be minded during most of the workshops to have uninterrupted time with their children who attended the workshops with them. Natalie and Yuna, who both have a child in junior infants and a child in Early Start, attended the workshops with both of their children. Both noted that this was a positive experience, with Yuna stating that she believes that her children's relationship with each other benefitted from attending the workshops together.

Another enabler that was noted was the scheduling of the workshops. Tracey noted that the time that the workshops were scheduled for (9 a.m. for three sessions and 1 p.m. for the library session due to opening hours) was suitable for parents and may have allowed for increased engagement from parents. Kofi, Agung, Yuna, Vedran and Robin mentioned work schedules. All noted how they altered their work schedule to attend the workshops with their children and did this with no issues due to the prior notice and suitable scheduling of the workshops. These parents were thankful that they did so, with Kofi noting, "It wasn't hard because I planned ahead".

Perhaps the most notable enabler was the addition of the translator parent, Asyah, who participated in the PEG and the pre and post-workshop interviews. She suggested herself that she would be useful to other parents who may have been reluctant to attend the workshops due to a language barrier. Asyah's first language is Arabic, and she has attended a number of courses to learn English. She explained that she spoke with the other mums who spoke

Arabic (some of whom she did not know before this series of workshops) and told them that she would help them engage in the sessions by translating the content. She then offered to run the sessions in Arabic, parallel to the sessions in English. She facilitated all of the sessions orally in Arabic ('Literacy in the Environment', 'Literacy in the Kitchen' and the 'Library Visit' session) and translated the book for the shared reading experience, "We're Going on a Bear Hunt" into Arabic, as well as facilitating this session orally also. She noted how she had now formed a friendship with the other mums and was now helping them sign up for English classes in the local education centre. She outlined that she enjoyed the experience of supporting other parents. Amira, one of the mums whom Asyah supported, noted in her interview that "it was nice" to have the support of other parents who speak the same language as her. Undoubtedly, Asyah was integral to this family literacy workshop programme and provided invaluable support for other parents attending.

To conclude, the practical enablers for successful family literacy programmes, as outlined by participating parents, include a suitable time and venue, appropriate childminding arrangements, ample notice to make prior arrangements and appropriate resources (both personnel and physical resources, including the crucial addition of the translator parent) for engagement of families from varying cultures, languages and backgrounds. These considerations, as outlined by parents, allowed for maximum engagement from parents, children and families.

5.3.2.4 Parent's Thoughts on the Future of Family Literacy in the School

All parents stated that after attending the family literacy workshops, they would recommend the workshop series to other parents and would like to see it run again in the school for other parents. Chloe, Kaylee, Natalie and Asyah described that they had already encouraged other parents throughout the four-week programme to join as they and their children were enjoying the sessions and benefitting from them. Tracey shared that she "thought it was brilliant... and really useful", while Amelia stated, "I congratulate you for putting it on, it was really, really good". When asked if they would like to partake in a similar activity again in the future, all fourteen parents said yes, with the majority of parents outlining that

they would now be more inclined to get involved in other school activities offered to parents. Five of the parents interviewed currently sit on the Parents Association and report that this results from these workshops. Amelia outlined in her post-workshop interview that due to her strong relationship with the school, her positive experience while participating in the workshops, and some recent availability in her work schedule, she would seek a more active role in the school community in the next school year, and she now sits on the Parents Association and acts as treasurer.

All parents shared suggestions when asked if they had any recommendations for changes to the workshop schedule or implementation. Half the parents suggested that the workshops should run for longer than four weeks as they enjoyed the sessions with their children and would have liked to attend more, with Chloe outlining, "maybe do more classes next time because it was great". Two parents suggested that the workshops may have been more beneficial if they were run earlier in the school year, with Agung stating, "maybe it should start earlier so at least then we would know people earlier". Natalie suggested that the workshop group should be smaller to allow for more interaction between the facilitators and the families, "if it was a smaller group, it would be more cosy, and you could focus more on what we are doing and get to know people even better". Eva, who has two daughters in senior infants who she believes may benefit from the sessions, suggested the idea of the classes being run for older children. Yuna recommended that the sessions be longer than 45 minutes, stating that she felt a little rushed in the baking session. She also outlined some recommendations for further sessions, including play-dough, clay, and family art sessions. Finally, Robin stated that although she knew it was not the purpose of these workshops, she felt it would be beneficial to link the sessions with the work done in the children's classrooms.

When asked if there was any negative feedback they could provide about the sessions, most parents said no, but some provided some constructive feedback. Two parents, Amelia and Robin, stated that although their children enjoyed the trip to the library, they found their time there to be unstimulating and found it hard to concentrate on the shared reading activity facilitated by the librarian. Vedran outlined that although he enjoyed the sessions and spending time with his daughter, he did not think that he learned any tips that may help him

support his child's literacy or language development as he would have used all of the techniques in the workshop previously. Parent feedback was noted, and some changes to the workshop schedule and resources were made for future use (see section 5.3.4). Due to its success, this set of family literacy workshops was rerun in the academic year 2022/ 2023, although not for the purpose of this research.

In conclusion, parents reported that this set of family literacy workshops successfully developed the proximal process of family literacy. The workshops were designed for the proximal process to become increasingly complex over time with the development of skills from week one to four. Workshops began primarily with an oral and practical focus and ended with a more structured literacy focus (through the library visit and shared reading experience). Opportunities for stimulating regular engagement between the parent and child were prioritised, and the child's microsystems and local environments were utilised. Parents reported overwhelmingly positive opinions of this four-week tailored family literacy programme, which was explicitly designed by the PEG with parents of Early Start and junior infants in mind. Finally, parents described positive relationships with the school, which may have contributed to the success of this family literacy programme.

5.3.3 Barriers Experienced by Parents

All parents mentioned barriers that they and their families face in relation to supporting their children's language and literacy development, engaging in family literacy activities, getting involved in school activities and building home-school relationships. Awareness of these barriers as both a researcher and HSCL may allow for more effective future practice. This section will provide a brief overview of the barriers reported.

Parent 'person' characteristics such as parental knowledge, confidence and language levels featured strongly during the interviews. When asked about supporting their children's language and literacy development and engaging in family literacy activities, the English language barrier was outlined by half of the parents interviewed. As noted earlier in this research, this school community boasts children who speak twenty-nine different languages. According to parents

interviewed, having English as a second language sometimes makes it difficult to support their children's language and literacy development in English. The differences in the way that words are pronounced, and the challenges that this brings for the family when they are engaging in shared reading activities were outlined by Agung, who noted that his daughter was developing an accent that was sometimes difficult for him to understand. He noted that he does not want to teach his child 'incorrect' pronunciations and lacks confidence in supporting her English language development. Kofi, Eva and Asyah noted that although their English had improved in the past number of years, they acknowledge that they would still like to work on their language skills to support their children. As noted in section 5.3.2.3.3, Asyah was an essential support for parents who spoke Arabic as their first language, enabling them to engage in the workshop process.

A lack of parental confidence and knowledge was alluded to by a number of parents, something which they see as a barrier to engaging in family literacy activities and supporting their children's language and literacy development. Abebi, Eva and Amelia noted that although they feel somewhat confident now while their children are young, they both worried that they will lack confidence in supporting them academically as they progress throughout the school system. Some parents reported that this lack of confidence stemmed from their own lack of formal education. Kofi noted that "I don't think that I have all the knowledge, you know that a teacher would have...I'm not really educated much", something which he noted influences his confidence in supporting his children's education and development. Abebi echoed this, stating, "like the big problem for me is like how I can help them when I don't know it... I don't go to school before, and it's really hard like". She acknowledged that she is "struggling with (my) education ... it's really hard but I'm trying my best"; however, she noted that her confidence has improved since she began the family literacy workshops. These workshops aimed to support parents in developing their confidence and skills to overcome this barrier and aimed to set the foundations for good practice from the beginning of their child's school education.

Parental interest and motivation were noted as elements which could be a barrier to building home-school relationships and developing family literacy. Chloe outlined how she enjoys engaging in school-run activities and that "it's awful when people don't come to them after you organise them". Yuna observed

that some parents drop their children in the morning and leave immediately and that this makes it challenging to build relationships with parents, "for parents, from my point of view, I would say 'hi, hi', 'bye, bye' in the yard or sometimes I don't even see whose parents are who so it's hard". Evidently, parents who engaged in this research are motivated and interested in their children's development and forming relationships with the school and other parents, however they acknowledge that this may be a barrier for other parents.

Parents outlined that their children's mood and interest levels sometimes affected their family literacy activities. Eva acknowledged that her child's motivation levels can be low and can act as a barrier to engaging in family learning activities. This was echoed by Vedran, who explained that his daughter can often be "lazy" and gets bored easily, which prevents prolonged family literacy activities. Children's energy levels were noted by Kaylee, Vedran and Tracey, who noted that their children can be tired after a long day in school and can be reluctant to engage in activities in the evenings. The idea of children getting bored during activities in the home was suggested by Vedran, Abebi and Asyah, who struggle to keep their children's attention when attempting to engage in family literacy activities but have learned some valuable tips and gained some engaging and fun resources from attending the workshops to help them with this.

Time, both micro and mesotime, was identified as a barrier to both parental involvement in school and family literacy development in the home. Kofi, Yuna and Robin noted that work commitments often dictate their ability to get involved in school activities regularly as they need to plan in advance to alter their work schedules (which they all managed to do to attend the workshop sessions). All three outlined that they looked forward to the summer holidays when they could manage their time and engage in more family literacy activities. Child-minding of younger siblings to allow involvement in in-school activities regularly and scheduling time to engage in family literacy activities with their school-going child was noted by both Kaylee and Amira, who both brought their younger children to some of the sessions but find it challenging to engage in family literacy activities at home due to their busy home lives. Abebi mentioned that she finds it challenging to balance her time equally between her three children, who are all six years of age and under. She has two children in junior infants, one diagnosed with Autism. Abebi engaged in the workshops with her other son in junior infants

as she felt that she often does not have the time to engage with him in the home, "three of them in the house is really hard for me... and sometimes I feel as if he (her child who engaged in the workshops) feels like he is left out". The workshops created time for families to work together on developing their family literacy practices and created an opportunity for parents to get involved in their child's school environment, aiming to overcome time as a barrier.

The difficulties brought on by the COVID-19 lockdowns (an element of macrotime) were noted by a number of parents who expressed the challenges to developing home-school relationships and getting involved in school life during this period. Agung explained how he had never been in the school building before these workshops, with Chloe outlining, "we never got to come in when they were in Early Start last year". Natalie mentioned that despite school efforts, she had difficulties engaging with the teachers over the phone rather than in person due to having English as a second language, outlining, "I was missing the parent-teacher meetings in person...it's not great on the phone really". These workshops provided opportunities for parents to re-engage with the school community through face-to-face encounters. In conclusion, parents identified a number of barriers they and other parents face when trying to support their child's language and literacy development, promote family literacy practices and build home-school relationships. This family literacy programme and the enablers outlined above aimed to alleviate some of the barriers reported.

5.3.4 Conclusion

To conclude, parents reported an overwhelmingly positive experience of attending these tailored family literacy workshops. All parents enjoyed the experience and reported that they and their children benefitted in varying ways from attending the workshops. Parents outlined the characteristics of a successful family literacy programme, such as the flexible, transferable and enjoyable content and the provision of useful resources. Parents also described aspects of the programme that allowed for optimal engagement, including the pre-existing positive home-school relationships, the translator parent, the facilitation of younger siblings, the time the workshops took place, and other factors outlined in the previous sections. It can be stated that this series of family

literacy workshops was a success, as outlined by all parents interviewed. Parents reported that these workshops met their needs for social connection, built their confidence and provided them with ideas for structure and activities for family literacy practices in the future. Parents outlined that their relationship with the school strengthened and that this experience would encourage them to participate in future parental involvement and engagement opportunities.

Due to the positive response outlined by these parents, the workshop series ran again (although not for the purpose of this research) in May 2023 with the parents of the children who were in Early Start and junior infants at the time (some of whom had attended the workshops in May 2022 also). Some alterations were made based on the suggestions provided by the parents in the post-workshop interviews (see chapter 5). Groups were smaller and only included one class at a time (instead of both Early Start and the two junior infant classes as was the case for this research). Due to other commitments, the workshops could not be run earlier in the year as suggested by Agung, and contrary to other suggestions could only be run for four weeks, again due to other commitments in the school. Session times were extended, as suggested by Yuna, with all sessions lasting 1 hour and 15 minutes in May 2023. Teachers were invited to participate in some of the sessions, where possible, to address the suggestion of a more structured approach to integration with classroom work. Parents reported overwhelmingly positive experiences again and enjoyed the sessions. Parents clearly outlined that this set of family literacy workshops positively impacted the proximal process of family literacy activities in their homes, although these are not recorded in this doctoral research.

5.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter aims to analyse and present the key findings for the doctoral research, presenting an analysis of the data from the pre and post-workshop interviews. The analysis of the eight pre-workshop semi-structured interviews and the fourteen post-workshop semi-structured interviews with the parents of Early Start and junior infant children who engaged in the family literacy workshops, is presented thematically in this chapter. All research questions were addressed using the data collection tool of the semi-structured individual interview.

The findings of this research are presented in accordance with the action research cycle that was undertaken for this doctoral research. The first stage, the 'planning' stage, involved gathering the ideas and opinions of the PEG, as outlined in chapter 4. These ideas and pre-existing guidelines for family literacy (NALA, 2020) were combined to form the basis for the 'action'- the tailored family literacy programme that took place in the school in May 2022 with twenty-eight families of children in Early Start and junior infants. Pre and post-semi-structured individual interviews were conducted in the 'reflection' phase, whereby parent's thoughts and experiences were outlined to provide an 'evaluation' of the series of workshops. The presentation of all data considers Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model and aims to explore the proximal process of interest and the effects of the 'person', 'context' and 'time' elements. The most substantial findings are presented in chapter 5, and will be further interpreted in the discussion chapter, where conclusions based on the findings will be drawn.

6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This discussion chapter aims to outline interpretations of the data collected for this doctoral research and to analyse the results. Commonalities and differences between the data collected and analysed for this research (as outlined in chapters 4 and 5) and the relevant literature (as outlined in chapter 2) will be drawn. Throughout this chapter, the findings are critically analysed with reference to existing literature in the areas relevant to this research, particularly family literacy, home-school relationships and educational disadvantage. The chapter begins with a reminder of the three research questions which underpin this research. Section 6.2 outlines the key findings and discussion around the area of literacy, in particular family literacy, exploring the ideas of pre-existing family literacy practices (section 6.2.1), characteristics of an effective family literacy programme (section 6.2.2), outcomes of this successful family literacy programme (section 6.2.3) and barriers to engagement (section 6.2.4). Section 6.3 looks at home-school relationships with the prerequisites for successful home-school relationships explored in section 6.3.1. Section 6.3.2 looks at opportunities for strengthening the mesosystem, while section 6.3.3 considers outcomes of strong home-school relationships. This section closes with a discussion on the barriers and enablers to supporting strong home-school relationships and partnerships. Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model is considered throughout this chapter. The research questions which underpin this research (as outlined in section 1.4) were considered when presenting the findings, analysis and discussion of the data collected for this research in this chapter.

6.2 Family Literacy

6.2.1 Pre-Existing Family Literacy Practices

The Department of Education and Skills (2011) define literacy as "the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media and digital media" (p. 8). French (2013) echoes this, outlining that literacy is not solely about letters and words but also includes verbal and non-verbal communication. This idea is explored by parents

across the three data sets, who outlined various ways their children use written, spoken, broadcast and digital literacy daily in real-life and environmental contexts for varying reasons, with communication being particularly important to parents. Parents across the three data sets identified many of the fundamentals of literacy that are referenced in the literature, including oral language, vocabulary, fluency, phonics, comprehension, and, in particular motivation and engagement (Carroll et al., 2011; Durham et al., 2007; Paratore et al., 2011). Emergent literacy skills were also discussed by parents, in particular in the pre-workshop interviews (see section 5.2.1.2), whereby parents acknowledged their child's developing emergent literacy skills and ways in which they support letter recognition, alphabet knowledge, pre-reading skills, word knowledge and print concepts (as outlined in Schmitt et al. (2011)). According to French (2013), the base for early literacy development is dependent on everyday communications, examples of which are outlined across all three data sets when parents speak of pre-existing literacy practices in the home, which include daily oral retelling of how the day in school went, oral storytelling, conversations stimulated by surroundings and the environment, structured language and literacy games and reading, to name but a few.

NALA (2011) define family literacy as the use and development of literacy in families and communities and the educational programmes that support and develop literacy in the family context, with Devitt and Ross (2022) outlining that family literacy involves activities that aim to improve language and literacy learning. As evidenced in Hegarty and Feeley (2010), there is a wide range of activities being carried out in the homes of the parents who engaged in this research across a range of diverse settings (as outlined by McCoy et al., 2010), and parents value these literacy practices (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010). "Essential for early learning is a stimulating environment" (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009, p. 11), an idea alluded to by many of the parents interviewed who prioritised their children experiencing a print-rich environment in the home and outside of it with ample opportunities for formal and informal language and literacy development. The PDST (2020) outline various activities and practices that families engage in, many of which are outlined in all three data sets for this research. Story time is an activity outlined by the PDST (2020) and by parents in the PEG and pre and post-workshop interviews. According to Burgess et al. (2002), there are numerous benefits to parents and children taking part in shared reading experiences. The PDST (2020) outline that these benefits

include encouraging a love for books, encouraging fluency in reading, developing listening skills and building relationships between the child and the parent. Although parents did not explicitly name all of the above as reasons they engage in story time, they noted that reading in the home was prioritised and was an important activity that they try to ensure happens regularly to prepare their children for reading in school, to encourage comprehension and to increase their children's confidence in reading. Other activities named by the PDST (2020) include child-led play, listening games such as I-Spy, baking, nature walks and free writing. All of these activities were incorporated into the workshop schedule, with some being practised by parents already. According to Sylva et al. (2004), the home learning environment children experience is more important for a child's development than social class, parent education or parent income. This research outlines the positive home learning environments these families report, and the many varied and stimulating opportunities parents outline their children are exposed to. The PEG-designed family literacy workshops aimed to build on these pre-existing practices, develop new effective practices in these home learning environments, and thus develop the proximal process of family literacy in these homes. According to Taylor (1997), all families, particularly those at risk of experiencing educational disadvantage, should be offered the opportunity to engage in programmes to promote literacy development in the family, as was the aim of this doctoral research. Early intervention is key, and opportunities to engage in programmes early in a child's school life allow for optimal development (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010). This research prioritised the engagement of parents of children aged 3 to 6 who may be at risk of educational disadvantage. According to parents, these family literacy workshops were effective and successful for many reasons, some of which are outlined in the next section.

6.2.2 Characteristics of Effective Family Literacy Programmes

The characteristics of an effective and successful family literacy programme are outlined in chapter 4, whereby the PEG participants' opinions and thoughts were explored, as was the relevant literature, in particular, the guidelines for effective practice as outlined by NALA (2020) titled *Enabling intergenerational learning: background report on family literacy and practices in Irish Education and Training Boards* (see sections 4.2.1.4 and section 4.2.2). Parents also identified effective

characteristics of the family literacy workshops that they engaged in in the post-workshop individual interviews (see section 5.3.2.3). Some characteristics were common to all three and will be discussed in this section.

A learner-centred approach that ensures that content is relevant to the learner's lives is outlined as essential by NALA (2020) and Carpentieri et al. (2011), and was identified as important by the PEG and the post-workshop interviewees. The importance of the children (and parents) being engaged and interested in the content, as well as it being relevant and adaptable, was central to effective practice in this research. The idea of programmes being beneficial to both children and adults, as outlined by NALA (2020), was echoed by the parents in both data sets also, in particular in the post-workshop interviews whereby parents noted numerous social, emotional and literacy-based benefits and outcomes that they, their children and their families experienced (see section 5.3.2) from engaging in these workshops. The importance of prioritising the learner's greatest needs is outlined by NALA (2020) as a critical element to consider when planning a family literacy programme. According to Eldering and Vedder (1999), there is no 'off the shelf' model for family literacy programmes, instead they should be designed to meet the specific needs of the participant group. This was a key element to this research, whereby the PEG was formed to identify the key needs of the parent cohort in this school setting. Participants in the pre-workshop interviews also identified needs, and these were considered throughout, as were any observations made using the field notes. Outcomes outlined by parents in the post-workshop interviews suggest that these needs were met (see section 5.3.2). Parents learned how to implement flexible, adaptable, transferrable, interactive and engaging family literacy activities with their children (see section 5.3.2.3). This research approached family literacy with a 'wealth-based' approach (as outlined in NALA (2011a)), whereby the assets, resources and competencies of families and this school community were valued and respected (NALA, 2010), contrary to the deficit approach outlined in much of the research in the area (including research by Jensen (2013), Taylor & Schatschneider (2010) and Buckingham et al. (2014) as outlined in chapter 2.

Learner supports were identified as essential to consider when designing and running a successful and effective family literacy programme (NALA, 2020; NALA, 2016). Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) outline that family literacy programmes should provide culturally appropriate support to engage and facilitate participants. Parents

across all data groups outlined barriers that may have inhibited them from engaging in this family literacy programme or supporting their child's language and literacy development (see sections 6.2.4 and 6.3.4). These barriers were considered, and enablers were put in place to support and maximise parent and child engagement, including the facilitation of younger siblings at the workshops (which alleviated childminding issues as outlined in NALA (2010)), the appropriate scheduling of the workshops to suit parents as much as possible time wise (to alleviate the time management barrier outlined by NALA (2010)), and perhaps the most effective enabler, the translator parent (which alleviated some of the issues felt parents who speak English as an additional language as outlined in O'Toole (2016)). The translator parent, Asyah, provided learner support for other parents in Arabic and facilitated their engagement, which would not have been possible without her assistance. Her role in the workshops also allowed an opportunity for the sharing and incorporating of culture and language (as outlined in NALA (2020) and by Taylor (1997)), the celebration of varying languages and literacies (as outlined by NALA (2010) and broke down barriers between the home and the school for these Arabic speaking families (as outlined in NALA (2011a)). The provision of tailored resources for each workshop (see appendices) was also outlined as a learner support, as parents and families could use these resources in the home after the workshops finished to structure their family literacy activities and practices (see section 5.3.2.3.2). Another guideline, as outlined by NALA (2020), suggests that achievements in family literacy should be celebrated. This was considered in each session, where parents and children were praised and acknowledged for their efforts by the co-facilitator and I. Each parent and child received a certificate at the final session to acknowledge their participation and engagement in the workshop series. A climate of encouragement and achievement was prioritised throughout (as outlined in Brooks et al., 2008).

The importance of building and sustaining collaborative partnerships is presented as a guideline for effective family literacy programmes by NALA (2020) and was a key element to this doctoral research and the HSCL scheme (Home School Community Liaison National Team, 2009). A particular element of this AR study that showcases this partnership is Asyah, the translator parent, who engaged in the PEG, the pre and post-workshop interviews and also facilitated the workshops in Arabic. Ensuring that participants are involved in all elements of the programme is

another guideline outlined by NALA (2020), with Asyah fulfilling this role. The formation of the PEG in this action research prioritised genuine participation and was collaborative in nature, placing importance on the participant's views and experiences while aiming to build capacity among participants (Gaffney, 2008), a key aim of the HSCL scheme (Department of Education and Skills, 2005). Relationships are also key in action research and are essential to make it a genuinely collaborative process (Gaffney, 2008), as was prioritised in this research.

The final NALA (2020) guideline relevant to this research is the importance of forming and sustaining learning relationships, a critical element of action research (as outlined by Gaffney, 2008). Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) outline the importance of ensuring that successful family literacy programmes prioritise meaningful home-school relationships and that they are a welcoming opportunity for parents, both of which were prioritised for this research. Parents reported positive relationships with the school and noted that after attending these workshops, those already strong relationships strengthened (see section 5.3.2). To summarise, the guidelines for effective practice, as outlined by NALA (2020) and the formation of the PEG, were both used as a guide to ensure that this family literacy programme best met the needs of participants. This research implemented enablers to ensure maximum parental participation, as is further outlined in sections 6.2.4 and 6.3.4. The following section outlines the positive outcomes that parents identified from engaging in this set of family literacy workshops, highlighting the success and effectiveness of this programme for parents, families and children.

6.2.3 Outcomes of Family Literacy Workshops

NALA (2020) describe family literacy as being a "multi-faceted approach to learning that brings substantial benefits to families, schools and communities" (p.114). This is reflective of this research, as numerous positive outcomes were outlined by parents in terms of benefits that they, their children and their families gained from attending the family literacy workshops (see section 5.3.2). Engagement in family literacy programmes can positively affect all family members (Taylor, 1997) for some time afterwards (NALA, 2016), as is evident from parent reports. Parents in this research outlined positive outcomes in relation to the development of family literacy practices

(the proximal process of interest) and also noted positive 'person' and 'context' outcomes.

According to NALA (2010), positive parent outcomes after engaging in family literacy programmes include developing 'person' skills and confidence, which was outlined by parents in this study who noted that they developed skills such as baking, time management and organisational skills (see section 5.3.2.2.1). Social and emotional outcomes were outlined by participants, who acknowledged that they enjoyed meeting other parents (as outlined in Swain et al. (2014)) and forming connections with them. Parents noted that they felt that the family literacy workshops provided them with an opportunity to integrate into the school community, an idea explored by NALA (2020), through interacting with other parents, children and staff. Opportunities to engage in family literacy programmes can offer opportunities to break down isolation felt by parents (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010), an outcome identified by parents who reported that this opportunity allowed them to make connections with other parents and with staff and eased the sense of isolation, in particular for two mothers who acknowledged this as a barrier as they do not work outside the home (see section 5.3.2.2.1). Parents also learned specific skills to promote their children's literacy development and enable them to be the first educators of their children (as outlined by Taylor (1997)), including the ability to structure and direct family literacy activities to maximise engagement while also promoting fun and enjoyment.

The idea of this family literacy programme offering opportunities for the development of home-school relationships (NALA, 2011) and the formation of meaningful relationships (Goodhall & Vorhaus, 2011) was outlined by all parents, who noted that their already strong relationship with the school had improved through engaging in this process. Family literacy programmes can encourage parents to become more involved and engaged in the school context (NALA, 2010), which parents noted occurred through these workshops and positively influenced their children. One parent outlined that it was a "little achievement for them (the children) to have their parents in school, its brilliant". As outlined in section 6.3.2, this programme allowed opportunities for strengthening the child's mesosystem and facilitated the home and school coming together.

Positive family impacts were outlined by parents also (see section 5.3.2.2.2). The increase in formal and informal learning opportunities (NALA, 2010) was an outcome mentioned by parents, who noted that family literacy practices now happen

more often in their homes and that they provide their children with more opportunities to engage in family literacy practices due to their experience in attending these workshops. Family social benefits such as spending quality time together and building relationships within the family unit (as outlined by Lamb et al. (2009)) were highlighted whereby one parent noted that the family literacy workshops offered opportunities for "easy time together". Bleach (2013) states that initiatives such as this build excitement in families and communities around education and this idea was reflected by parents in the post-workshop interviews also. One participant outlined how her son "would get excited the night before every one of the sessions and he would be excited to see us in the school". To summarise, it is evident that this tailored family literacy programme resulted in numerous benefits for parents, children and families, with parents reporting positively on their experience of engaging in this research process.

6.2.4 Barriers and Enablers to Family Literacy

Literacy is unfairly distributed across society (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010), with some children, parents and families struggling to reach their full literacy potential. According to NALA (2010), parents face numerous barriers when attempting to engage in family literacy practices, including 'person' and 'context' barriers. These barriers can include time management, English as an additional language and a lack of confidence in supporting their children's language and literacy development, all of which were also outlined by the parents in this study. As is the case for this research, the provision of successful and effective family literacy supports and programmes can help overcome barriers that parents may face, particularly those at risk of educational disadvantage (NALA, 2010).

According to Eivers et al. (2005), not all parents may be best equipped to support their children's language and literacy development and may lack confidence in doing so. One potential barrier outlined in this research, both in the PEG and in the post-workshop interviews, was that parents from low-SES areas may lack the resources they believe are important to support their child's language and literacy development, whereby potential poverty and a lack of resources are referred to (see section 4.2.1.4.4.2 and 5.3.3). Jensen (2013) states that children from areas of low-SES can face issues with their language and literacy development due to a lack of

parental interest. This research strongly disputes this statement and shows the motivation and interest of each parent who participated in engaging in activities and programmes to support their child's language and literacy development. Parents who participated in This AR study prioritise their child's development, as outlined by CSO (2014), but acknowledge that at times, they are unsure of how best to support it and lack confidence in doing so, as discussed by Hegarty and Feeley (2010). A key aim of this research was to build parent's capacity as their child's primary educator and to raise parental confidence. Parents reported that although they feel confident in supporting their children's language and literacy development while they are young, they fear that they may face challenges as their children develop, similar to the parents interviewed by Hegarty and Feeley (2010). This research aimed to develop the proximal process of family literacy within families of children at a young age to ensure that these families develop skills and practices that they can utilise in the home to best support their children's development in the emergent language and literacy stage.

6.2.5 Conclusion

To summarise, parents who engaged in this research value their children's language and literacy development and are motivated to engage in practices that will aid this development, contradicting literature and research that comes from a deficit viewpoint. Parents reported that strong pre-existing practices occur in many of these homes prior to this research and outlined numerous benefits that they, their children and their wider families experienced and continue to experience from engaging in this family literacy programme, many of which are outlined in the relevant research (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010; Lamb et al., 2009; NALA, 2010; NALA, 2016; Swain et al., 2014; Taylor, 1997). This family literacy programme successfully engaged and sustained parents throughout the four weeks due to the enablers implemented and prioritised to overcome the identified barriers. This programme was designed for parents by parents, and the characteristics of an AR study were prioritised throughout, while parents were encouraged to be active and collaborative participants. This programme also prioritised forming and maintaining strong partnerships between the home and school, which will be discussed in section 6.3.

6.3 Home-School Relationships

As outlined in the literature review, the parent is the first and primary educator of the child (Bunreacht na hEireann, 2009). Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) outline that parental support is needed for children to reach their full potential in school, thus highlighting the importance of ensuring parents are involved and engaged in their child's schooling and learning from the outset. This research takes place in the context of a DEIS school in an area at risk of low socio-economic status and educational and socio-economic disadvantage. According to NIACE (2013a), parental involvement is over four times more important than SES in influencing academic success, evidencing the importance of facilitating and prioritising parental involvement, engagement and partnerships in schools, as is a crucial priority for this research.

As evidenced in the findings in chapters 4 and 5, all parents who partook in this research were motivated to work with the school to build stronger connections within their child's mesosystem (NCCA, 2009). Section 6.3.1 will outline some prerequisites for parental involvement and engagement from both the school's and parent's sides. Opportunities for strengthening the relationships in the mesosystem (the home and the school) will be outlined in section 6.3.2. The benefits of building parental partnerships will be discussed in section 6.3.3. The section will close by outlining the barriers and enablers for optimal parental partnerships (section 6.3.4). Section 6.3 will compare the literature on the area (as outlined in section 2.5) and the data analysis from the three data sets for this qualitative research (see sections 4.2.1.4, 5.2 and 5.3).

6.3.1 Prerequisites for Forming Partnerships

To form and build positive partnerships between the home and the school, both elements of the mesosystem must be engaged positively. As outlined by Kocayoruk (2016), schools are responsible for offering opportunities to support and facilitate increased parental engagement. However, parents are also responsible for engaging in these opportunities and getting involved (Kocayoruk, 2016). Although some of the literature (which comes from a deficit viewpoint) presented in Chapter 2 outlines that SES may be a potential barrier to parental involvement and engagement in education (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Gilleece, 2015; Sacker et al., 2002), or

that parents from low-SES areas may be unfamiliar with the importance of parental engagement (Lott, 2001), this research finds that these parents of children who attend this school that is at risk of educational and socio-economic disadvantage are highly engaged and motivated to form strong home-school relationships and be involved in their child's schooling and learning, an important prerequisite for forming parental partnerships. Parents interviewed expressed some of their motivations for involvement and engagement with the school, including having an opportunity to spend some quality time with their children and build relationships with them (Lamb et al., 2009), to show their children the importance of education and school and that this is prioritised in the family (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014), to promote positive attitudes to school (Wanat, 1997) and to develop the already strong relationship that they have with the school (NCCA, 2009). These motivators, combined with well-planned and inviting opportunities for engagement (as outlined below), are important prerequisites for forming partnerships between the home and the school and strengthening the mesosystem.

It is the school's responsibility to provide opportunities for developing partnerships and to ensure that all parents feel supported to engage in these opportunities (NCCA, 2009). Strong home-school relationships can be formed when parents feel comfortable, valued and respected (NCCA, 2009), as reported by the parents in this research. This idea is outlined by Nzinga-Johnson et al. (2009), who notes that for the relationship between the home and school to be effective, an atmosphere of warmth, trust and communication is crucial. According to participants in this qualitative research, the atmosphere in this school is positive, friendly and welcoming, with one parent commenting on the "personal experience" that she is met with each morning at the school gate where she is greeted by name by numerous staff members. The idea of putting trust in the school is explored by one parent, whereby the school is described as a "safe place".

Parents identified the HSCL as a critical player in the development of the open and welcoming environment that they experience in the school, noting that they are addressed by name each morning by the HSCL, something that one parent acknowledges "makes you want to get involved" (see section 5.3.1.2). The HSCL was also highlighted as a bridge between the home and the school (Mulkerrins, 2007) and a facilitator of clear and effective communication between the two. It is apparent that when parents and school staff are motivated to form collaborative

partnerships and prioritise effective and genuine communication, opportunities for the child's social, emotional and academic development are optimal.

6.3.2 Opportunities for Strengthening the Mesosystem

The rich data collected from this qualitative research outlines many varied and successful opportunities for parental involvement and engagement that are offered to the parents in this urban DEIS band 1 primary school. As outlined in section 2.5.1, Epstein and Sanders (2002) explore several effective types of parental involvement which play a crucial role in the development of the relationship between the home, school and community, all of which were alluded to by parents as happening in the school prior to this research.

Firstly, the idea of familiarising the school with the background and cultures of families was discussed, with events such as International Day being mentioned by parents from varying nationalities. Events such as these and a culture of inclusion and respect are crucial to promoting parental engagement as not all cultures are equally valued in the traditional education system, according to Trumbull et al. (2001). Measures such as these aim to alleviate this issue and ensure that families' cultural and linguistic practices are prioritised (as outlined by O'Toole et al., 2019). The promotion of routines and parenting practices in the home to support learning and development is outlined by Epstein and Sanders (2002) and is echoed by parents in this research, whereby parents noted the support they get from staff in the school to do so, and outline that they appreciate this support (see section 5.2.3.3). Effective, open and positive two-way communication was referenced in all three data sets, with all parents acknowledging that the communication in this school is two-way and is facilitated through online, face-to-face and written supports. Epstein and Sanders (2002) outline that this communication is crucial and, according to parents, is prioritised by staff daily, from class teachers to the HSCL to the principal (see sections 4.2.1.4.3 and 5.2.3.1). Epstein and Sanders' (2002) idea of parents being offered opportunities for involvement in school was discussed by parents in the PEG focus group and the pre and post-workshop interviews, with opportunities that had run in the school previously, such as parent classes, sports days, parent information meetings and others mentioned. Parents value these opportunities for involvement in school-led activities, and according to Goodall and Montgomery (2014), these

opportunities build a foundation for the transfer of knowledge. School collaboration with the community was highlighted by parents, including links with the local library (as a result of this research for most parents) and the work of the HSCL as the point of intersection between the home, school and community to promote reciprocal relationships (as outlined by Mulkerrins, 2007).

The opportunities for parental involvement in schooling and children's learning, as outlined in the previous paragraph, act as a stepping stone for more genuine parental engagement in schooling and in learning in this school context (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014) and should begin early in a child's school life (Kocayoruk, 2016), as is the case for this research (and many of the opportunities offered by the school) which focuses on parents of children aged 3-6. Parental engagement is more dynamic than involvement (O'Toole et al., 2019) and gives parents a feeling of ownership as shared educators of their children (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014), as was the aim of this doctoral research. Opportunities for parental engagement in children's learning are clearly prioritised by the parents who participated in this research, who see their child's learning as an aspect of their role as parents (as outlined by Peter et al. 2007). This was acknowledged by parents in this research, who noted that they are aware that it is the responsibility of all parents to engage and support the school's efforts, and it is not just the job of the teacher to educate their children (see section 5.3.1.2). As outlined above, schools have the responsibility to offer opportunities to facilitate increased parental engagement and involvement, and according to these parents, they and others have a responsibility to take schools up on these offers (Kocayoruk, 2016). Parental engagement in learning, as described by these parents, included extra-curricular undertaking and learning opportunities provided by parents outside the home (as noted by Goodall and Montgomery (2014)), including family literacy practices, which are a key element of this research and have been discussed earlier in this chapter, in section 6.2.1.

Parental involvement and engagement are both crucial for building relationships with parents and strengthening the elements of the mesosystem, while prioritising children's social, emotional and academic development, as well as their enjoyment of school and behaviour in school (O'Toole et al., 2019). However, a move towards partnerships in education is encouraged to allow for more genuine engagement from parents and more authentic relationships to be formed, as was the intention of this AR study. Opportunities for partnerships within this DEIS school prior

to this family literacy programme were outlined by parents, including the opportunity for parents to be involved in the Parents Association, which allows for the sharing of power between the parents and the school and also allows for shared decision-making opportunities (as outlined by Epstein and Sanders (2002)). The engagement of the PEG in the design of this set of family literacy workshops prioritised parent expertise and experience and valued their strengths (NALA, 2020) while aiming to understand their practices at a higher level (NCCA, 2009). The expertise and experience of all participants was respected and utilised, and encouraged parents to reflect on their current practices (as outlined in Bleach (2013)). According to Bastani (1993), authentic and genuine dialogue is prioritised when creating home-school partnerships, as was the aim of both the focus group and the interviews that were carried out for this research. Partnerships such as this benefit all, including parents, children and school staff, as outlined by parents in the post-workshop interviews. These benefits are outlined in the next section, section 6.4.3.

6.3.3 Benefits of Involvement, Engagement and Partnerships

Positive home-school relationships and partnerships benefit children (Wanat, 1997), parents and school staff (NCCA, 2009). Parents outlined some benefits they identified from the positive parental involvement and engagement experiences they had in the past and from engaging in the PEG and the family literacy workshops for this research. Child and parent 'person' benefits were outlined by parents where benefits such as child engagement and motivation and positive child attitudes towards school, as outlined by Wanat (1997), were reported as benefits to parental engagement (see section 5.2.3.2). A number of parents outlined that their children's confidence improved through this set of workshops (as outlined by O'Toole et al., 2019), with one parent outlining that the process "built her (daughter's) confidence" (see section 5.3.2.2.3). Parent benefits included increased parental confidence (as discussed by Taylor (1997)), a feeling of happiness and comfort in the school and a feeling of support from school staff members (see section 5.2.3.2), as outlined by NALA (2011). Parents reported that due to regular, positive interactions with the school, they feel valued and respected in the school (see section 5.2.3).

Parents who participated in the post-workshop interviews reported that they, their children and their wider families benefited from engaging in this set of family

literacy workshops from a perspective of strengthening the elements of their child's mesosystem. Child benefits included experiencing more secure connections between the home and school environments (as outlined by NCCA, 2009). According to O'Toole (2016), the stronger the links in the mesosystem (the home and the school), the easier it is for children to navigate between them, and this idea is demonstrated by a clear example of a child's mesosystem aligning as a result of these family literacy workshops is described by her mother (see section 5.3.2.2.3), stating that her child is now more settled in school and is happier coming into school in the morning. The consolidation of the child's learning between the home and the school, as outlined in the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2023), was alluded to by parents as a benefit of attending these family literacy workshops also.

Home-school relationships can benefit hugely from family literacy programmes (NALA, 2010), an idea parents identified in this research. Parents outlined that their relationship with the school and their ability to support their child's learning benefited in numerous ways from engaging in these PEG-designed family literacy workshops. Social benefits were outlined by parents, who discussed the opportunity that these workshops gave them to build relationships with the school and with other parents in the school community (as outlined by Swain et al. (2014)). Parents outlined that they gained confidence in supporting their child's schooling by engaging in the process (as noted by NALA (2016) and Taylor (1997)). The idea that this family literacy programme offered an opportunity for integration into the school community was also outlined by parents (NALA, 2020), as was the opportunity to form meaningful home-school relationships (Goodhall & Vorhaus, 2011). Parents shared their experience of acquiring new skills and developing in the role of the first educator of their children (Taylor, 1997). Finally, teacher and school staff benefits included gaining from parent expertise and having an opportunity to understand families at a higher level (NCCA, 2009), both of which were achieved through this qualitative study.

6.3.4 Barriers and Enablers to Parental Involvement, Engagement and Partnerships

By viewing parental involvement, engagement and partnerships through a bioecological lens, we can view multiple factors at play for families in a dynamic and fluid manner (O'Toole et al., 2019). Parents who participated in this research

reported positive relationships with their child's school and teachers; however, parents from all three datasets also outlined some potential barriers to parental involvement, engagement and partnerships with the school and to developing strong home-school relationships. Parents acknowledged process, person, context and time barriers in the three data sets for this research. Hartas (2008) outlines that it is critical not to make assumptions that parents do not care about their children's learning if they are not seen to be involved in the school, but instead acknowledge various factors which may be at play and aim to work with parents to address these problems, as was the case for this research, which aimed to acknowledge these factors and create enablers to alleviate them.

One barrier which was shared across all three datasets was differences in cultural or linguistic capital (O'Toole et al., 2019). Speaking English as an additional language, which, as O'Toole (2016) outlines, can make engagement in school activities difficult for parents due to language barriers, was noted in all three data sets. However, of the 21 participants (the PEG, pre and post-interview participants combined), 12 speak English as an additional language, with a high number of participants who engaged in the workshops and not the interviews also speaking English as an additional language. Harris and Robinson (2016) outline that schools often fail to include parents with varying linguistic practices, leading to a lack of engagement from certain communities, a thought at the forefront of this research. In response to this, the support of the translator parent, Asyah, was highlighted as being an invaluable resource for Arabic-speaking parents (through facilitating the workshops in Arabic, translating workshop resources and supporting EAL parents), highlighting the success of integrating the culture and linguistic practices of families into school activities (as explored by O'Toole et al. (2019)) (see section 6.3.4 for further enablers).

Although parents stated they lacked confidence and knowledge in supporting their child's language and literacy development (see 5.3.3), no parents shared that they lacked confidence or felt intimidated to get involved in activities or events in their child's school. According to Hornby and Lafaele (2011), parents from areas of low-SES can avoid involvement and engagement in their children's schooling due to confidence issues or intimidation; however, this was not outlined as a barrier by any parent, instead strong and supportive relationships between the home and the

school were highlighted, as was the school's efforts to ensure good communication is upheld (as suggested by O'Toole et al., 2019).

Singh et al. (1995) outline that parental aspirations for their children are more important in influencing child achievement than parental formal education and note that parental aspirations can even be more important than parental involvement or engagement in school. Research carried out by the Dartington Social Research Unit (2006) found that parents from low-SES areas have high aspirations for their children, however there may be a lack of understanding of the pivotal role that parents have in enhancing their child's learning and a lack of confidence in doing so. This idea was replicated in this research, whereby parents outlined that they were highly motivated to support their children's learning and development, however they wished to increase their confidence and skills in doing so. Some parents in this AR study outlined that they themselves lack formal education also, with one parent expressing, "I want my kids to reach where I could not reach" and another noting, "for me, education is really important because I didn't go to school and it's really hard like I don't want them to be like me, I just want them to do greater than me and better". It is clear that although these parents did not get the opportunity to gain a formal education themselves, their aspirations are high for their children, and they are motivated for their children to do well. According to NALA (2010), parents' past experiences with education can also influence their ability to form partnerships with the school either positively or negatively. Past experiences that parents spoke about were generally positive, with one parent outlining her long standing relationship with the school (as a past pupil and now a parent) in a positive manner and noting that this may have encouraged her to be involved in school activities (see section 5.2.3).

According to Hornby and Lafaele (2011), fathers tend to be less involved with their children's school, and although this was not mentioned by any of the participants in this research, a look at the participant profiles (see section 4.1.1, 4.3.2 and 4.4.2) suggests this. Of the twenty-one parents who participated in the various stages of this AR study, only four were fathers (one member of the PEG and three participants in the post-workshop interviews). Eight fathers participated in the family literacy workshops, but no individual data was collected from them.

A final barrier outlined by parents across all three datasets was time management (NALA, 2010). Time management was an issue for parents, whereby, at times, they found it challenging to schedule time for coming to the school due to

other commitments, including work and looking after younger siblings (NALA, 2010). The pre-decided time for this set of workshops, first thing in the morning, on the same day every week (as suggested by the PEG), seemed to alleviate this issue for parents and allowed for optimal engagement whereby parents rearranged work schedules and were welcome to bring younger children to the sessions with them.

One barrier outlined by NALA (2010) that did not emerge anywhere in this data was difficult relationships between the home and the school due to differences in ethnicity, language and culture. According to Tobin et al. (2013), a 'clash of the cultures' may exist for parents, children and families from different cultures to that of the dominant culture in the school, making it difficult for families to uphold their identities; however, this does not seem to be the case in this school. Parents who participated in this AR study reported quite the opposite, outlining a warm, inclusive environment with opportunities for all to engage. Parents of children who attended DEIS schools with a HSCL in research conducted by NALA (2010) outlined that they had a positive and open relationship with the school and the HSCL and felt valued and respected, as is the case in this research. To summarise, when parents faced barriers, they reported that specific enablers that were put in place to support them allowed them to work around the barrier.

6.3.5 Conclusion

To conclude, parents who engaged in this action research expressed positive views towards their relationship with their child's school and highlighted that they see parental involvement and engagement as important. Parents reported that they are motivated to form partnerships with the school and see it as their responsibility to prioritise engagement with the school (Kocayoruk, 2016), an important prerequisite to strengthening the elements of the mesosystem. Parents acknowledged that the school provides ample opportunities for involvement, engagement and the formation of partnerships and promotes a warm environment and positive communication, naming the HSCL as an important player in this (as outlined by Mulkerrins, 2007). Parents identified various opportunities for involvement, engagement and the formation of partnerships within their child's mesosystem. Benefits to these partnerships, as well as barriers and enablers, are outlined in this section. Evidently, strong links exist between the homes of these families and this DEIS band 1 school

due to the motivation of the parents involved, the provision of supports such as the HSCL (Mulkerrins, 2007) and the warm environment created and sustained in the school (Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009).

6.4 Chapter Conclusion

Chapter 6 presents an interpretation and discussion of the key findings outlined in chapters 4 and 5. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the findings from this qualitative action research study and compares them with the existing literature in the relevant areas of family literacy, home-school relationships and educational disadvantage. The chapter begins by considering family literacy practices and outlines key findings while noting comparisons and differences between this research and the existing literature in the area. The research findings emphasise that parents who engaged in this research value their children's language and literacy development and are motivated to engage in practices that will aid this development. Strong pre-existing practices existed in many of these homes prior to this research. Parents outlined positive outcomes and important benefits that they, their children and their wider families experienced from engaging in this research, many of which are outlined in the relevant research and literature presented in chapter 2. The findings presented in chapter 5 and discussed in chapter 6 outline that this family literacy programme successfully engaged and sustained parents; this was supported through the provision of specific enablers that were implemented to overcome the identified barriers.

The chapter then explores home-school relationships, with parents reporting positive views towards their relationship with their child's school both pre and post-workshops. Parents expressed that they value opportunities for parental involvement and engagement in school and their child's development and are motivated to support this. Parents reported that they are motivated to form partnerships with the school and see it as their responsibility to prioritise engagement with the school (as outlined by Kocayoruk, 2016), as is evident in the level of engagement shown by parents. The HSCL is named as an important player in developing and sustaining home-school relationships and positive communication, as outlined by Mulkerrins (2007), and is valued by parents. Parents reported that they, their children and their families benefited from engaging in these PEG-designed family literacy programmes,

with numerous positive outcomes outlined. Overall, this tailored family literacy programme designed for parents by parents was a success.

7 Conclusion

This qualitative action research study set out to explore family literacy and home-school relationships in this DEIS band 1 urban primary school in an area of educational and socio-economic disadvantage. The research was conducted with the parents of the children in Early Start (a preventative preschool intervention scheme offered to select DEIS schools for children aged 3 and 4 who are at risk of not reaching their full potential through the school system), junior infants and first class as the participants. This research was conducted through a bioecological lens and offers a mechanism to interrogate the complex interactions involved in family literacy programmes by considering the 'process', 'person', 'context' and 'time'. By designing a set of tailored family literacy workshops with the parents of the children in first class (the Parent Expert Group), this research aimed to provide an understanding of how this type of support may influence a) family literacy practices in the homes of parents of children in Early Start and junior infants, b) home-school links and relationships between these families and the school and c) parental confidence and capacity to support their children. This innovative research sought to be egalitarian, participatory, and emancipatory and provided opportunities for democratic dialogue through the use of a methodology which valued and placed importance on the participant's own voices and experiences. This qualitative research aimed to address the three research questions outlined in section 1.4.

This action research offered a unique methodological stance by prioritising the PEG as a mechanism to develop already strong home-school relationships and develop family literacy practices. It drew in parents of children in first class as co-designers of this workshop programme and demonstrated their expertise as their child's primary educator. Parents were encouraged to be active and collaborative participants in this phase of the research cycle. Parents who attended the tailored workshops designed by the PEG reported that this process was successful in various ways, outlining many benefits that they, their children and their families experienced as a result of attending these tailored workshops. Parents can often see their own practices and capabilities in a deficit manner; however, this research reinforced for parents that they are doing a fantastic job in supporting their children's language and literacy development and highlighted that they are a wealth of

knowledge and are indeed experts. This research developed parent confidence and allowed opportunities for parents to enjoy quality time with their children. It gives the reader a clear picture of the rich family literacy practices happening in the homes of the families who partook in this research and the varying opportunities and practices that children are exposed to. By engaging in this research, parents were encouraged to name all of these practices specifically and identify themselves as their children's primary educators. This research facilitated opportunities to increase parent's capacity to recognise themselves in this role, a key aim of the HSCL scheme. Furthermore, it has highlighted parents as partners in their child's education and operationalised this in a viable and valuable way. The findings oppose the literature that takes a deficit stance on family literacy and parental engagement in areas of low-SES and instead highlight the motivations and interests of these parents in supporting their children's language and literacy development. The research participants were self-selecting and were the parents who opted to take part in this research. These parents shared and demonstrated that they are motivated and interested in engaging in activities to develop and sustain their children's language and literacy skills and are interested in building and sustaining positive relationships with the school. Although educational capital is not named in any stage of the data collection, it is evident that the parents who engaged are motivated to raise their children's educational capital through engaging in school and home based activities as outlined in this research.

This action research follows the framework as outlined by Reason and Torbett (2001) (see section 3.6) whereby the first, second and third-person practice and knowledge created through action research is considered. A brief summary of the key findings from this research is outlined in section 7.1, with findings categorised according to first (section 7.1.1), second (section 7.1.2) and third (section 7.1.3) person knowledge and practice. Section 7.1.1 is written in the form of a reflective statement, while section 7.1.2 and 7.1.3 are summarised using bullet points.

7.1 Summary/ Key Findings

7.1.1 My Reflective Statement and First- Person Research Findings

This doctoral research has been over four years in the making. I began the research as a junior infant teacher in 2019 with an interest in fostering parental engagement

and working towards sustaining and building positive relationships with the parents of the children in my class. I was approached about fulfilling the role of HSCL in the school shortly after I began this research process and this opportunity was pivotal in the development and success of this research and in my own personal development over the past number of years. When the COVID 19 pandemic hit and the world changed, the research changed and I, the researcher, also changed. This time gave us an opportunity to reflect on the value of relationships, communication and the support we receive from those around us. It placed value on the role of the school community for staff, children and families.

Without doubt, I have developed as a researcher, HSCL and as a person through the experience I have gained from engaging in this doctoral research I have engaged in continuous reflective first-person practice throughout the process, which has allowed me to appreciate the privileged position that I hold as researcher, HSCL and teacher. I have considered the power dynamics that may have been at play throughout this research and aimed to alleviate this through the genuine respect and acknowledgment of the parents as experts in their own children's development. As outlined in section 3.10 and section 4.3.3, I was also acutely aware of my actions, and of the impact of my action, throughout the research process and took steps to reduce any perceived power dynamics throughout the research process. I am not a parent and am not from the locality in which the research took place, so although I have experience in the world of education, I am very aware (and was aware throughout this research journey) that I am not the expert here, the parents are. This awareness and respect for the parents influenced the research from the very beginning, when the idea for the PEG was first considered, and continued right throughout the research process in the development, design and implementation of the research.

I have also learned the importance of simple enablers that I would previously have considered but perhaps would not have deemed essential. These include, but are not limited to, being the friendly face that parents feel comfortable to approach, making time to say hello and acknowledge parents, scheduling engagement opportunities at a time which suits parents, providing an opportunity for younger siblings to attend and having informal conversations over a cup of tea, to name a few. Although perhaps I am ashamed to admit, my opinions and attitudes towards the parents and families who engaged in this research have also changed from engaging in this research. These parents face barriers on a daily basis and still manage to

ensure that their children are supported and engaged in learning where possible. These families engage in rich learning experiences and value education, something which I may not have fully understood or appreciated prior to this research. I now, more than ever, respect, value and appreciate the numerous efforts made by these families on a daily basis to ensure that their children's development is prioritised. Without doubt, I have developed considerably as a researcher, HSCL and person through the experiences I have gained by completing this doctoral research.

7.1.2 Second- Person Research Findings

- The PEG offered participating parents an opportunity to use and share their knowledge and expertise to support the development of family literacy in other families' homes in this DEIS band 1 school.
- Parents reported positive outcomes in terms of the development of the proximal process of family literacy practices as a result of engaging in this set of tailored workshops. These include increased time spent on family literacy activities, improved 'person' characteristics such as increased parental confidence to engage in these activities and increased parental skills to ensure that the activities are engaging and fun for their children, as well as other important outcomes for the children, parents and families.
- Outcomes reported by parents considered all aspects of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model- the 'process' (development of family literacy practices), the 'person' (increased confidence and competence in parents and children), the 'context' (of positive home-school relationships) and 'time' (the facilitation of a regular time for parents to engage with their children and the school).
- As outlined by parents, when the context of the home and the school are aligned experientially, outcomes are optimal for all.
- This research provided an opportunity for further development of the strong home-school relationships and genuine engagement in the school, as reported by all parents who noted their already positive relationships with the school improved and that they experienced further integration into the school community and built relationships with school staff and other parents by engaging in the workshop process.

7.1.3 Third- Person Research Findings

- Parents who participated in this research are experts in their own children. This research set out to reinforce this thought amongst parents and develop their confidence in their own capacity to support and facilitate their children's development, a key aim and contribution of the HSCL scheme.
- This set of PEG-designed and tailored family literacy workshops was a success, as reported by parents who attended. Twenty-eight families engaged in the programme for four weeks, and those who engaged in the post-workshop interviews reported positive outcomes for themselves, their children and their families.
- Suggestions from the PEG to ensure the success of the workshop programme included inviting children to attend the workshops as well as the parents, the translator parent, the structure of the sessions, the timing of the sessions, as well as other suggestions. These suggestions were critical to the success of the workshops, with parents reporting the effectiveness of many of the enablers put in place to overcome barriers.
- Barriers exist for all parents in supporting their children's language and literacy development and in engaging in regular family literacy practices with their children. As outlined, enablers implemented for this research alleviated some of these barriers and allowed parents to engage in this tailored family literacy programme and develop skills, competencies and confidence to support the proximal process of family literacy in their homes.
- Barriers exist for families to engage in opportunities for parental involvement and engagement in the school. Again, enablers implemented for this research alleviated some of these barriers and allowed for optimal engagement in this opportunity for parental engagement and the development of home-school partnerships.
- Parents reported that strong home-school relationships existed in the context of this DEIS band 1 primary school prior to this research, with parents acknowledging the pre-existing positive two-way communication, the

proactive nature of the staff, opportunities for engagement with the school and the positive, trusting and warm relationships they had with the staff. Parents named the HSCL specifically as an important player in developing and maintaining the strong relationships between the various elements of the mesosystem, outlining the critical role of the HSCL in this school. Parents also stated that they felt respected and valued within the school community, acknowledging the time made for each parent and any issues they have.

- This research found that the role of the HSCL was well established in the school and was an important part of the school community. Parents identified the importance of the HSCL and noted the strong connection they had with the HSCL.

7.2 Implications/ Recommendations for Future Practice, Policy and Research

This research was done at a small scale in this DEIS band 1 urban primary school in an area of socio-economic and educational disadvantage and produced rich and deep context-specific findings, as is evident in section 7.1. It should be noted that this DEIS school is unique, as is each school and its staff, students and families. Although the key ideas behind this research could be used in a similar way in other schools, the development of this research was specific to this school context and to the changing needs of the families and students in the school community. This thesis paves the way for future practice, policy and research in the areas of family literacy and partnerships with parents and shares the importance of the role of the HSCL in the Irish education system. Five key recommendations are outlined below.

1. Family literacy programmes should not be “off the shelf”

This research explores the importance of ensuring that family literacy programmes are not 'off the shelf' and instead are tailored to the specific needs and wants of the community in which they are run. There is an opening for more genuine engagement opportunities for participants, where the parent is seen as the expert in their own child and as a primary educator. This research highlights that when the participant's voice is heard and prioritised, the results can be optimal for parents, children, families and the school. Including all families was a central priority for this study, in particular those who did not speak English as their first language. The provision of

the translator parent allowed for maximum participation opportunities for all, an idea that could be encouraged for other such programmes and initiatives. Other supports such as the opportunity to bring younger children along (which eliminated childcare) and the timing of the programme were identified as parents as facilitators also.

Although this is not a 'one size fits all' approach to family literacy programmes, other HSCLs, both novice and experienced, may be able to take some key learning from this research such as the importance of the genuine engagement of the participants, the provision of essential supports to ensure that parents can engage and the importance of building and sustaining meaningful relationships. All schools serve different families and face different barriers however variations of these key ideas may be beneficial to other HSCLs in running similar programmes with a potential to adapt some of the key learning from this research to make it suitable to their school community's specific needs.

2. Increased provision of resources and funding is needed for family literacy

Although a small-scale and low-cost study, the research required the provision of resources, including financial resources (provided by the school), time allocation (in particular, the time given to the planning, preparation and implementation of the workshops by I, the researcher and the PEG) and support services (for example childcare and the translator services). This family literacy programme could not have run without these resources. An increased provision of dedicated funding and time allowances should be prioritised to facilitate family literacy programmes and parental engagement opportunities in schools, which as outlined in the findings from this research, benefits all.

3. The importance of family literacy opportunities should be prioritised among HSCLs

The role of the HSCL is extremely busy, encompassing many elements and providing daily challenges. It is often a role which involves 'firefighting' or dealing with prominent issues as they arise for families and parents at risk of educational and socio-economic disadvantage. Although this is indeed a key element of the HSCL role, having seen the benefits of this family literacy programme for parents, children, families and the school, I will certainly ensure that I and the school prioritise family literacy opportunities going forward and would recommend that extra opportunities

should be prioritised for and by HSCLs to focus on family literacy practices and opportunities for genuine parental engagement. The provision of this tailored family literacy programme inside the school, during school time and run by familiar personnel (as opposed to an external location, time or personnel) allowed for maximum engagement and shows the importance of the HSCL allocating time and resources to provide opportunities such as this for families, an idea which may be beneficial to reiterate with other novice and experienced HSCLs.

4. The role of the HSCL needs to be more widely recognised and the role of the HSCL should be disseminated

A key aim of this research was to add to the limited research on the work and the role of the HSCL in the Irish education system. This research wishes to outline some of the key elements of the HSCL scheme by highlighting the crucial work carried out by HSCLs in DEIS schools in Ireland. More research is needed to disseminate this work, as I firmly believe that the role of the HSCL should be more widely recognised as a critical element in our education system and as a key player in tackling educational disadvantage. As outlined in the opening stages of this thesis, this research has been shared at conferences and in webinars both nationally and internationally and I intend to continue to share these important findings with relevant stakeholders. I intend to publish a research paper in collaboration with my research supervisors to highlight the key findings from this piece of research as another opportunity to disseminate the importance of the role of the HSCL also. Another crucial group with whom I intend to share these research findings are the staff and parents of the children in the DEIS school where this research took place. I believe sharing such positive findings will inspire and encourage both staff and parents to recognise further the importance and value of family literacy activities and programmes and of building and sustaining strong home-school relationships.

I believe that there is an opening for this research to be further shared amongst HSCLs and family literacy tutors in Ireland, perhaps as a continuous professional development opportunity or as a further training opportunity. Both novice and experienced HSCLs could benefit from the dissemination of some of the key findings of this research. Training could be developed for staff to highlight the importance of ensuring genuine participation and engagement of parents in school-organised activities and to promote the importance and value of drawing on parent

expertise to inform practice and, indeed, policy. Perhaps training on such initiatives could be included in the annual HSCL training run by Tusla Education Support Services (TESS), which targets in particular HSCLs on the start of their journey in this position. I intend to share this research amongst HSCLs in Ireland through the weekly newsletter that is issued to all HSCLs by TESS and also at a more local level to HSCLs in my local and family cluster meetings (regular meetings which all HSCLs in the locality in which I work attend). In February 2023, I presented the preliminary findings of this research to a group of family literacy tutors in an ETB in Munster. It is now my intention to form links with other ETBs and to present these crucial findings in other areas of Ireland also.

5. The role of the HSCL and the duration of the role may need to be considered

Currently, the maximum term that a HSCL can be released from teaching duties in Ireland is five years. Although I see merit in this in some ways, I believe this should be slightly more flexible and should be at the school's discretion. The HSCL spends significant time building and sustaining relationships with parents, upskilling in relevant areas and building expertise in various aspects of the role within these 5 years. A transition period should be encouraged and facilitated nationwide to make the transition of the new HSCL a more streamlined process for the school and the families with whom the HSCL works.

7.3 A Final Reflection

“Success is a journey, not a destination”.

This doctoral journey has been one which, over the past four years, has provided many highs and lows with much learning and development along the way. The desire to carry out this professional doctoral research came from my deep passion for my work and was rooted in my love for my job and for research. This research allowed deep connections to be developed, positive outcomes to be experienced, and can be described as a success according to the participants. It has been a memorable experience which has benefitted me professionally and personally and is one I will carry with me throughout my life and my career in education.

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9 Appendices

9.1 Appendix A: Board of Management Information Sheet and Consent Form



Title of Study: “Exploring the impact of a parent-designed family literacy programme in a DEIS primary school on family literacy practices, home-school relationships and confidence”

Dear Chairperson/ Principal,

I am a Doctorate in Education student in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. As part of my research, I hope to organise a 4-week block of 40-minute parent literacy workshops in our school. I hope to set up a PEG (Parent Expert Group) consisting of 4/5 parents from the two first classes. This PEG will work with me to plan and organise parent workshops that I envisage will scaffold the parents in our Early Start and junior infant classes to support their children in their learning both at home and in school (while also staying in line with our DEIS plan to include and integrate parents in their children’s learning). These workshops will be run in the school and all parents of children in Early Start and junior infants will be invited to attend. The children of the parents who partake in the workshops will be invited to attend the workshops also as this is a family literacy intervention and this will allow the parents to practise their new skills with teacher support. I am asking for consent to carry out this research in our school with the parents of children in Early Start, junior infants and first class. The study will involve focus groups with the PEG, pre and post-workshop interviews with workshop participants and informal field notes taken during workshops. The interviews will take place in our school after the children leave school or at a time which is convenient for the parents. I intend to start the PEG in the school year 2021/2022 and hope to hold the workshops in the school parent’s room.

I foresee no risks for the study, beyond those experienced in everyday life. The information gathered will be treated with privacy and anonymity. No information regarding the school or the participants will be revealed in any part of the research and no names will be mentioned at any point. Information will be stored safely with access only available to the research team and examiners and it will all be destroyed after 10 years. The anonymised results from the study will be included in my thesis and may be discussed at conferences or published in a book or a journal. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time, without saying why.

If you have any questions or if anything is unclear, just ask and I will explain it in greater detail.

Finally, thank you for taking time to read this information sheet.

Maria Kennedy

Researcher (Ms Kennedy) Contact details: kennem20@tcd.ie

Supervisor Contact details: Ann Devitt devittan@tcd.ie, Joanne Banks banksjo@tcd.ie

Title of Project: “Exploring the impact of a parent designed family literacy programme in a DEIS primary school on family literacy practices, home-school relationships and confidence”

No participant is under any obligation to participate in this study. If they agree to participate, but at a later stage feel the need to withdraw, they are free to do so. It will not affect anyone in any way.

Please answer **all** of the following (tick the appropriate box):

	Yes	No
I have read and understood the subject information sheet.	☐	☐
I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for	☐	☐
I am fully aware of all of the procedures that parents and teachers in the school will be involved in and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.	☐	☐
I know that all participation is voluntary and that participants can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.	☐	☐
I am aware that all results will be kept anonymous.	☐	☐
I agree to all the study above to be undertaken in the school.	☐	☐

Signature of Chairperson/ Principal

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

9.2 Appendix B: Parent Expert Group Information Sheet and Consent form

Title of Project: “Exploring the impact of a parent-designed family literacy programme in a DEIS primary school on family literacy practices, home-school relationships and

What is this project about?

I am a Doctorate in Education student in Trinity College. I am looking at the support that children get from home and from their parents to develop their reading and speaking. I am hoping to work with parents in our school to help them to work on ways that they can support their child in his/her learning at such an important time in their lives through family activities and games.

What are you asking me to do during the project?

I am inviting you to be part of a PEG (Parent Expert Group) which will work with me to think about the most important things that parents would like help with when supporting their children’s reading and learning. I will also ask you about all the amazing things you do at home with your children. I will then take these ideas and plan classes with your help to support other parents in our school.

What information will be gathered?

We will work together to use your opinions and ideas to allow you to help us to create fun ideas for parent workshops that would help many parents in our school to support their children in their learning inside and outside

When and where will this take place?

You will be invited to come to our school at a time that suits you and the other parents who will be participating. We will do our PEG in November 2021.

If you have any questions or if anything is unclear, just ask and I will explain it to you.
Finally, thank you for taking time to read this information sheet.

Maria, HSCL

Researcher (Ms Kennedy) Contact details: kennem20@tcd.ie

Supervisor Contact details: Ann Devitt devittan@tcd.ie, Joanne Banks banksjo@tcd.ie



*All data taken for this project will be stored safely and will be destroyed after 10 years. It will not be shown to anyone aside from my supervisor and other members of

Title of Project: “Exploring the impact of a parent-designed family literacy programme in a DEIS primary school on family literacy practices, home-school relationships and confidence”

You do not have to participate in this study. If you agree to participate, but at a later stage feel like not participating, you are free to do so. It will not affect you in any way.

Please return this form by October 15th.

Please answer **all** of the following (tick the appropriate box):

		Yes	No
I have read and understood the subject information sheet.		☐	☐
I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for.		☐	☐
I am fully aware of all of the parts of the study I will be involved in and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.		☐	☐
I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.		☐	☐
I am aware that my results will be kept without my name.		☐	☐
I agree to participate in the PEG focus group with Maria and other parents.		☐	☐

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature of Researcher (Maria)

Date

9.3 Appendix C: Workshop Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Title of Project: “Exploring the impact of a parent-designed family literacy programme in a DEIS primary school on family literacy practices, home-school relationships and

What is this project about?

I am a Doctorate in Education student in Trinity College. I am looking at the support that children get from home and from their parents to develop their reading and speaking. These workshops will look at ways that you can support your child in his/her learning at such an important time in their lives through family activities and games. The ideas for these games and activities have come from parents in first class in our school.

What are you asking me to do during the project?

I am inviting you to attend 4 parent support workshops that have been created by first class parents and I. You and your child are invited to come to these workshops free of charge to learn some fun ways to help your child with their learning both inside and outside of school.

What information will be gathered?

You will have the option of taking part in a short interview with me before and after the workshops also if you would like to (you will be allowed to listen to your interview and change some of your answers if you wish). I will take some notes during the workshops to help us to plan for the next ones and to see what's working and what's not working. We will invite your children to the workshop so that you can practice some of the new games you have learned with your child with some teacher support. I will also take some photos during the workshops but will make sure nobody's faces are in them.

When and where will this take place?

Workshops will be at 9am on a Thursday morning in school mostly. Some workshops will be in our locality also. The workshops will last for 4 weeks and will run in May 2022. They will take 40 minutes each. Your child will attend the workshops

If you have any questions or if anything is unclear, just ask and I will explain it to you. Finally, thank you for taking time to read this information sheet.



Ms Kennedy

Researcher (Ms Kennedy) Contact details: kennem20@tcd.ie

Supervisor Contact details: Ann Devitt devittan@tcd.ie, Joanne Banks banksjo@tcd.ie

*All data taken for this project will be stored safely and will be destroyed after 10 years. It will not be shown to anyone aside from my supervisor and other members of Trinity College

Title of Project: “Exploring the impact of a parent-designed family literacy programme in a DEIS primary school on family literacy practices, home-school relationships and confidence”

You do not have to take part in this study. If you agree to take part, but at a later stage feel like you would like to withdraw, you are free to do so. It will not affect you in any way. Please return this form by April 30th.

Please answer **all** of the following (tick the appropriate box):

		Yes	No
I have understood the study that is talked about in this sheet		☐	☐
I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for.		☐	☐
I am fully aware of all of the parts of the study I will be involved in and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.		☐	☐
I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.		☐	☐
I am aware that my results will be kept without my name.		☐	☐
I agree to participate in the parent workshops.		☐	☐
I agree for my child to partake in some of the workshops with me.		☐	☐
I agree for non-identifiable photographs to be taken.		☐	☐
I agree to participate in the interview with Maria.		☐	☐

Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

Signature of Researcher (Maria) Date

9.4 Appendix D: Workshop Participant Consent Form to Accompany Video

Title of Project: “Exploring the impact of a parent-designed family literacy programme in a DEIS primary school on family literacy practices, home-school relationships and confidence”

You do not have to take part in this study. If you agree to take part, but at a later stage feel like you would like to withdraw, you are free to do so. It will not affect you in any way.

Please return this consent form by April 30th.

Please answer **all** of the following (tick the appropriate box):

		Yes	No
I have understood the study that was talked about in the video.		☐	☐
I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for.		☐	☐
I am fully aware of all of the parts of the study I will be involved in and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.		☐	☐
I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.		☐	☐
I am aware that my results will be kept without my name.		☐	☐
I agree to participate in the parent workshops.		☐	☐
I agree for my child to partake in some of the workshops with me.		☐	☐
I agree for non-identifiable photographs to be taken.		☐	☐
I agree to participate in the interview with Maria.		☐	☐

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature of Researcher (Maria)

Date

9.5 Appendix E: Ethical Approval

Below is a screenshot from my TCD Blackboard account outlining that updated ethical approval was granted from the college on 18th August 2021 for this research.

My Marks		
All Marked Upcoming Submitted Order by: Module Order		
ITEM	LAST ACTIVITY	MARK
Application Status View Description	18-Aug-2021 12:26 MARKED	Approved
Scanned Signed Consent Forms DUE: 30-AUG-2020 Assignment	UPCOMING	- /100
May-August Ethics submissions DUE: 11-AUG-2021 Assignment	18-Aug-2021 12:25 MARKED	Approved

9.6 Appendix F: Focus Group Schedule

Focus Group Schedule

Good morning and welcome to our focus group. Thanks for taking the time to join me to talk about all of the fantastic work you are doing with your children to help their learning, in particular their developing speaking, reading, and writing skills. We are going to combine our ideas and thoughts together to come up with some ideas about how we could help other parents in supporting their children's speaking, reading, and writing. I want to know what you do with your children at home, what you like to do and what you don't like to do and if you have any ideas around how the school could further help you in supporting your child. There are no wrong answers and some of you may have different points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Keep in mind that I'm just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are the most helpful.

As discussed, I'm going to record the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful and interesting things in these discussions, and I can't write fast enough to get them all down. I won't use any names when I write my findings and you will be anonymous.

The ideas and thoughts that we discuss today will help us to design a set of workshops for the other parents in Early Start and junior infants. You are known as the Parent Expert Group because your ideas will be used to design these workshops and I want as much input from you as possible as you are the experts in your own children. Feel free to outline anything you do at home to help your child, or activities you did when your child was younger. You are all doing an amazing job and I'm really interested to hear your thoughts. I'm going to just read out a brief consent sheet and if you're all happy with it, we will sign it and begin the conversation.

Again, thank you for participating. Let's begin.

Activities in the home:

- Tell me about some of the learning activities that you do with your child at home.
- What do you do with your child to help them with their reading?
- Think of a good learning moment with your child- what did that look like? Where was it? When was it? Why was it good?
- Think of a learning moment that may not have worked as well, how was it different to the previous one? Why do you think it may not have worked as well?
- What things do you do with your child that you find helps them to learn in school? Why do you do this?
- What informal activities do you do that might help your child to develop their language and reading skills?
- How do you encourage your child to read?
- Can you describe a typical reading experience between you and your child?
- Do you do any learning games or activities with your child? If so, could you describe these? What do they look like? What do you use?
- Why do you do these games/activities?
- How do these activities help your child? With their reading? Speaking? Confidence?

Confidence and advice:

- How confident do you feel about supporting your child's reading, writing and language?
- What helped you to gain this confidence?

Barriers:

- What challenges do you come across when trying to support your child's learning at home?

Other parent's confidence and workshops:

- What supports may other parents need to get them to this level of confidence?
- What advice would you give to other parents about supporting their child's language and reading skills?
- Are there any strategies or activities that you feel would be useful for other parents that you would like to share?
- If you were doing these workshops, what would you have liked to have learned when your child was at that stage?
- What would you like to have known? What would have been helpful? What would have been useful for you?
- What time would best suit for this workshop to take place?
- Where would be the best place to have the workshop?
- What would attract parents to participate in the workshop/ encourage them to continue to participate?

School:

- What's the best way for the school to communicate with you?
- Tell me about a good time you communicated with the school?
- What information do you think parents should have about their children's learning in school that would help them to support their children at home?
- Is there anything that we haven't discussed that you would like to talk about?

Thank you for your participation in this group. I would love to check back in with some of you when I get a chance to listen back to this conversation and start to plan the workshops. If you would like to be involved in the running of them, please let me know, your advice would be invaluable. Thanks again.

9.7 Appendix G: Pre-Workshop Interview Schedule

Pre-workshop Interview Schedule

Good morning and welcome. Thanks for taking the time to join me to talk about all of the fantastic work you are doing with your child/ children to help their learning, in particular their developing speaking, reading, and writing. Thank you also for agreeing to participate in the family literacy workshops in our school with your child over the coming weeks. I want to know what you do with your child/ children at home, what you like to do and what you don't like to do and if you have any ideas around how the school could further help you in supporting your child. We will also discuss your confidence around supporting your child in school and how best we could help you in this area. These questions can be answered about activities in any of your languages that you speak at home!

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, and your opinion is greatly valued and appreciated. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what you think I may want to hear! Keep in mind that I'm just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are the most helpful.

As discussed, I'm going to record the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful and interesting things in these discussions, and I can't write fast enough to get them all down. I won't use any names when I write my findings and you will be anonymous. You will be invited to participate in another interview after you and your child have attended the four-week programme to check back in on how you feel after attending the programme.

Pre-existing family learning:

- What things do you do with your child in junior infants/ Early Start that you find helps them in school? Why do you do this?
- How do you think these activities help your child? With their reading? Speaking? Confidence?
- Where do most of your learning experiences with your child happen?

- Think back to a time recently when you spent time with your child where some learning may have happened. Where was it? What did you do?
- Tell me about some of the learning activities that you do with your child at home.

Parental confidence:

- How confident do you feel about supporting your child's reading, writing and language?

Scale 1 to 5, 1 being I'd like some help and new ideas and 5 being I'm quite confident.

- How could you be supported in building this confidence (if needed)?

Barriers:

- What challenges do you come across when trying to support your child's learning at home? / What things make it difficult to support your child?
- Did you come across any challenges in supporting your child's transition to school?
- Do you come across any challenges that may influence your confidence in supporting your child?

Home/ school relationships:

- What support do you think parents should receive in school?
- What extra support could we have provided when your child began in the school?
- How do you find the home/ school communication?

Workshops:

- What do you hope to learn/ get out of these parent workshops?
- What would you like to do during the workshop sessions?
- Why did you sign up for the workshops?
- What would you hope your child would get from doing these workshops?

Other:

- Is there anything that we haven't discussed that you would like to talk about?

9.8 Appendix H: Post-Workshop Interview Schedule

Post-workshop Interview Schedule

Good morning and welcome. Thanks for taking the time to join me to talk about your experience with the family learning workshops that we have taken part in for the past number of weeks in school. Thank you also for giving your time to attend these workshops with your child.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, and your opinion is greatly valued and appreciated. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what you think I may want to hear! Keep in mind that I'm just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are the most helpful.

As discussed, I'm going to record the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful and interesting things in these discussions, and I can't write fast enough to get them all down. I won't use any names when I write my findings and you will be anonymous.

Workshops:

- Which workshop was your favourite? Why? (I know I was there but describe for me a bit how it ran for you and why you liked it)
- Was that the one you found most useful? If not, which was the most useful?
- What motivated you to join the workshops? What did you want to get out of them?
- What did your child get from doing these workshops?
- What did you learn/ get out of these parent workshops?
- What's the most important piece of information you take from these workshops?
- Have you implemented any of the activities at home since the workshops?
- Has your family learning time changed since you engaged in the workshops?

- What about the resources from the workshops – did you use any of them at home / did you find any of them useful – what was good about them (length, focus, etc.)?
- Do you have any recommendations on how to make the workshops better?
- Would you recommend other parents to attend workshops similar to these? What would you say to them? Why would they like it?
- Did you come across any challenges during the workshops programme sessions?

Parental confidence:

- How confident do you now feel about supporting your child's reading, writing and language after partaking in these workshops? Did these workshops help increase your confidence?

Scale 1 to 5, 1 being I'd like some help and new ideas and 5 being I'm quite confident.

- How could you be further supported in building this confidence (if needed)?

Home/ school relationships:

- Do you feel as if your relationship with the school community has benefited from attending these workshops?
- Can you describe any benefits to home/school relationships you can think of in partaking in workshops like these in school?
- Would you be more inclined to partake in other parent activities after this?
- What it is like supporting your child's learning at home – are there still areas where you could use some support? What kinds of ways? What ways do you think the school can help in that?

Other:

- Is there anything that we haven't discussed that you would like to talk about?

9.9 Appendix I: Key Skills and Concepts

Potential key skills and concepts to be covered in each session

Session 1: Literacy in the Environment

- Phonological awareness- isolating beginning sounds- find something that begins with a 'c'
- Alphabet knowledge- finding letters on environmental print e.g., shop/ signposts
- Listening skills- listening to and following instructions
- Free writing skills- spelling 3 letter words- find the 'sun' and spell
- Rhyme- identifying rhyming words- find something that sounds like bee
- Blending and segmenting- 3 letter words in the environment- I can see a d-o-g
- Questioning- in relation to the environment- I wonder why that tree has no leaves?
- Oral retelling- My favourite part of the day/ activity

Session 2: Literacy in the Kitchen

- Phonological awareness- next add in something that is white and starts with 'm'
- Alphabet knowledge- shaping cookies to spell names
- Letter recognition
- Listening skills- listening to and following instructions- procedure
- Rhyme- can you use something that rhymes with moon to stir the cookie mix?
- Blending and segmenting- 3 letter words
- Questioning- where will we put the cookies to cook them?
- Oral retelling- what did we do today? What was your favourite part?
- Predicting- what will happen when the cookies go in the oven?

Session 3: Shared Reading

- Phonological awareness- during picture walk- I can see an animal that starts with 'd'
- Alphabet knowledge- identifying of letters in the book
- Print concepts- conventions of print, book handling, etc.
- Listening skills- throughout the session
- Rhyme- 'we can't go over it, we can't go under it'
- Blending and segmenting- 'Uh-Uh! M-u-d!'
- Questioning- what would you do if you met a bear? Would you be scared?
- Oral retelling- favourite part of story, sequence of events in story
- Predicting- picture walk at the start, what do you think will happen next?

Session 4: Trip to the library

- Print concepts- conventions of print, book handling, etc.
- Listening skills- throughout the shared reading session
- Questioning- throughout the reading session based on the book of choice
- Oral retelling- favourite part of trip to the library
- Predicting- picture walk at the start of the chosen book
- Possibilities of rhyme, alphabet knowledge, blending and segmenting opportunities in the chosen book

9.10 Appendix J: Blank Observation Rubric

Aspect to be observed	Parent and children engaged
Print in the environment	
Phonological awareness	
Alphabet knowledge	
Rhyme	
Blending and segmenting	
Questioning	
Oral retelling	
Listening skills	
Free writing skills	
Flexibility	
Following child's lead	
Following child interest	
Communicating in second language	

Notes:

9.11 Appendix K: Workshop Advertisement Poster



FREE PARENT WORKSHOPS IN SCHOOL!!

Ms Kennedy is running **parent and child classes** for 4 weeks
The classes will be on **Thursday mornings at 9am**
We will start on **Thursday 12th May**
The classes will be 40 minutes long
Your **child** will come to the classes too!
We will go on **fun trips**

Would you like to learn some fun games to play with your children over the summer holidays?
Would you like to help your child get ready for Junior and Senior Infants next year?



Each week will be something different:

May 12th - a **walk** around our local area with your child

May 19th - **baking** with your child in school

May 26th - a visit to the local **library** with your child

June 2nd - **Games** and ideas for making learning fun at home



It will help
your child's
confidence
and social
skills

You will learn
some games to
play during the
summer with
your children

Your child will
love seeing
you in school!

You will be
helping your
child to be
more and
more
successful in
school!

**Why should I go to
these workshops?**

It will help your
child get ready
for school next
year!

You will get to
meet other
parents

**It will be
fun!**

You will get
some tips about
how to make
learning fun!

9.12 Appendix L: Non-Identifiable Photographs from the 'Literacy in the Environment' Session



9.13 Appendix M: “Literacy in the Environment” Scavenger Hunt

Parent Workshops

Session 1

Literacy in the Environment

Option 1: You can draw a picture of the object, write the word or just put a ✓ in the box

Can you find.....

Something red	Something in the shape of a circle 	
Something that has leaves	Something that is spiky	Something blue
Something that you can sit on	An animal	Something that is hard

Option 2: You can draw a picture of the object, write the word or just put a ✓ in the box

Can you find.....

Something that begins with the letter 'c'	Something that is green and soft	 ---
Something that is brown and hard	Something that begins with the letter/sound 'b'	Something that rhymes with 'bee'
Something that begins with the same sound as snake	A c-a-r	Write a word you see on a signpost

Examples of answers:

Option 1:

A flower 	Water fountain 	The sun 
The trees 	The bushes 	The sky 
A bench 	A dog 	A rock 

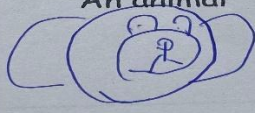
Option 2:

A cat 	The grass 	s u n 
A branch 	A bird 	A tree 
Slide 	A car 	Park 

9.14 Appendix N: Samples of Completed Scavenger Hunt Activities

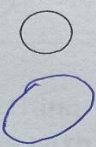
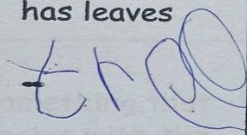
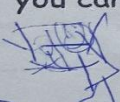
You can draw a picture of the object, write the word or just put a ✓ in the box

Can you find.....

Something red ✓ Lady's Hair	Something in the shape of a circle Bike wheels	 ✓
Something that has leaves Tree	Something that is spiky ✓ railings	Something blue ✓ Boys Hoodie
Something that you can sit on Bench	An animal 	Something that is hard ✓ Ground

You can draw a picture of the object, write the word or just put a ✓ in the box

Can you find.....

Something red - Swing "the seat" - rope in play ground	Something in the shape of a circle 	 Sun
Something that has leaves 	Something that is spiky FLAW flower	Something blue - hat
Something that you can sit on  Bench	An animal dog	Something that is hard rock

9.15 Appendix O: Key Ideas from “Literacy in the Environment” Workshop

Parent tips for ‘Literacy in the Environment’ session

Simon says can be used to cover lots of different ideas

- **Colours**- Simon says..... find something blue/ green/pink
- **Shapes**- Simon says..... look for something round/square
- **Sounds**- Simon says..... find something that starts with the sound ‘s’ (for example the sun)
- **Letters**- Simon says.... look for the letter ‘s’ on a signpost (for example a stop sign)
- **Spellings/ three letter words**- Simon says.... find a c-a-r/ c-a-t/ d-o-g (using phonics sounds)
- **Description of objects**- Simon says.... look for something that has leaves (a tree) / is blue (the sky) / is soft (the grass)
- **Rhymes**- Simon says.... find something that sounds like/ rhymes with bee (for example a tree)/ cat (mat)/ dog (log)

I- Spy can be used in the same way!

- **Colours**- I spy with my little eye something that is orange
- **Shapes**- I spy with my little eye something that is like a triangle
- **Sounds**- I spy with my little eye something beginning with the sound ‘t’ (for example a toy)
- **Letters**- I spy with my little eye the letter p (for example on a sign for the word shop)
- **Spellings/ three letter words**- I spy with my little eye a c-a-t/ a d-o-g (using phonics sounds)
- **Description of objects**- I spy with my little eye something that is fluffy (for example a dog/ cat)
- **Rhymes**- I spy with my little eye something that sounds like a bar (a car)

Use the below videos to learn pronunciation of sounds:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ksblMiliA8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvJKc0Ord1g>

Week 1

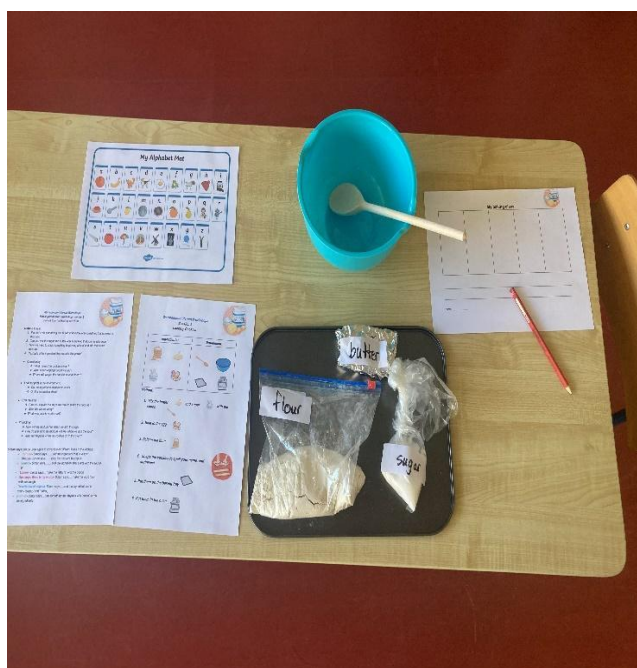
"Literacy in the Environment"

[illegible]

- Quick notes - I may have missed some interactions I think

- Magnifying glass worked really well
- A lot of families did the 2 hunts
- Parents mingling a lot - mixing between classes
- Oral retelling = very successful

9.17 Appendix Q: Non-Identifiable Photographs from the 'Literacy in the Kitchen' Session



9.18 Appendix R: Participant Instructions for “Literacy in the Kitchen”

Workshop

Literacy in the Kitchen

Literacy Cookies -Ingredients and Method

Ingredients:	Equipment:
   	   

Method:

1. Mix the butter and sugar with the spoon



0. Beat in the egg



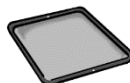
0. Fold in the flour



0. Shape the cookies to spell your name, add sprinkles!



0. Put them on the baking tray



0. Put them in the oven



9.19 Appendix S: Key Ideas from “Literacy in the Kitchen” Workshop

Parent tips for ‘Literacy in the Kitchen’ session

Method ideas:

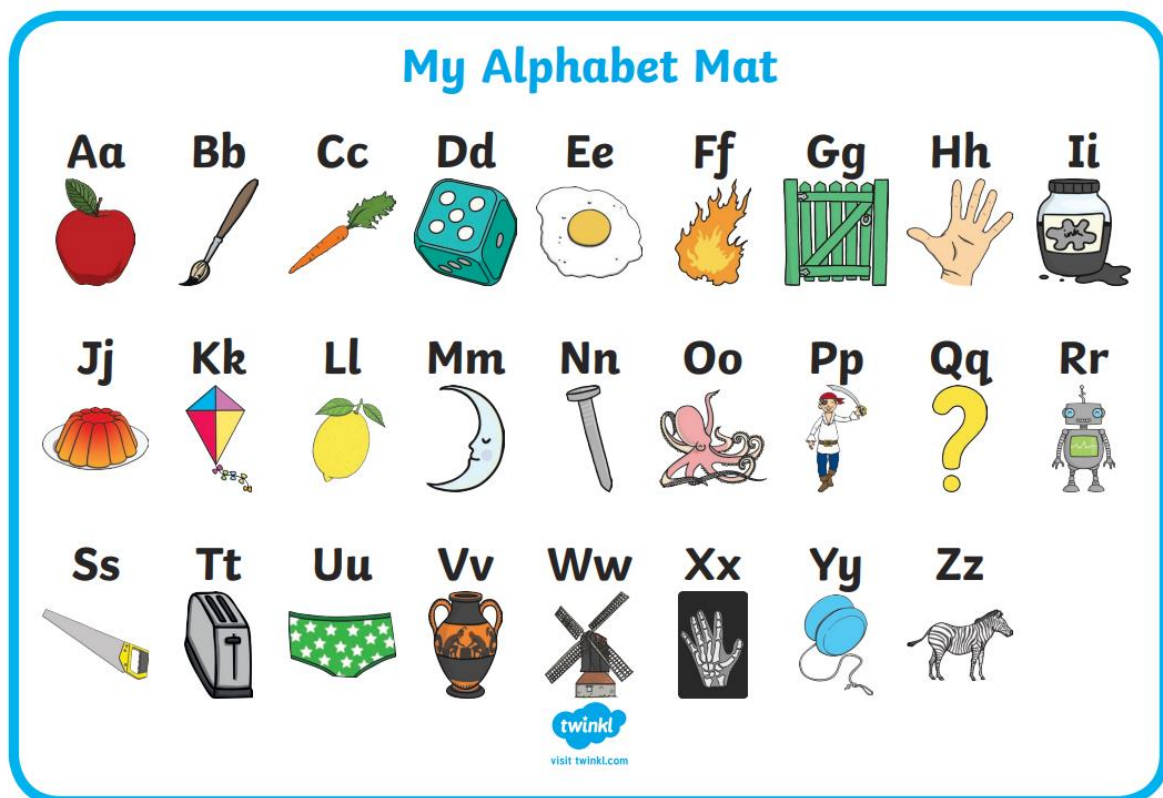
1. First let’s mix something that is soft and yellow with something that is sweet in this bowl
 2. Can you mix the sugar and butter with something that sounds with ‘moon’?
 3. Now we need to crack something beginning with ‘e’ and add that to the mixture
 4. Next add white ingredient that sounds like ‘power’
- Questioning:
 - What makes the cookies sweet?
 - What other toppings could we add?
 - Where will we put the cookies to cook them?
 - Look for print in the environment:
 - On the ingredient’s wrappers/ labels
 - On the instruction sheet
 - Oral retelling:
 - Can you explain the steps we took to make the cookies?
 - What did we do today?
 - What was your favourite part?
 - Predicting:
 - How will the mixture feel when we add the egg?
 - How do you think the mixture will feel when we add the flour?
 - What will happen when the cookies go in the oven?

Simon says can be used again to cover lots of different ideas in the kitchen:

- **Colours**- Simon says..... add the ingredient that is yellow

- **Shapes**- Simon says..... look for a square baking tin
- **Sounds**- Simon says..... add the ingredient that starts with the sound 'b'
- **Letters**- Simon says.... make the letter 's' with the dough
- **Spellings/ three letter words**- Simon says.... make the word 'c-a-t' with the dough
- **Description of objects**- Simon says.... add the ingredient that is grainy (sugar)/ soft (butter)
- **Rhymes**- Simon says.... use something that rhymes with 'moon' to mix the ingredients

9.20 Appendix T: Alphabet Mat



9.21 Appendix U: Observation Rubric for 'Literacy in the Kitchen' Session

19.5.2022

Observation Rubric for Parent Classes
Week 2
"Literacy in the Kitchen"

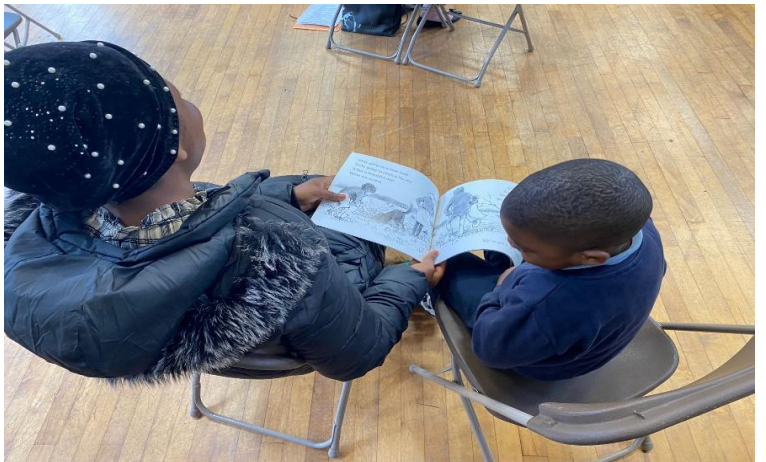
Aspect to be observed	Parent and children engaged
Print in the environment (labels, etc)	(28)
Phonological awareness	(16)
Alphabet knowledge	(28)
Rhyme	(8)
Blending and segmenting	(6)
Questioning	(28)
Oral retelling	(23)
Listening skills	(28)
Free writing skills	(9)
Flexibility	(9)
Following child's lead	(13)
Following child interest	(8)
Communicating in second language	(11)

Notes:

Child Interest → made cookies using spare dough in the shapes of children's interest eg. heart, football, dinosaur

- Again oral retelling = successful
- Parents investigating games with alphabet mat
- EAL parents found rhyme difficult
- Fun!
- Early finishing activity worked well

9.22 Appendix V: Non-Identifiable Photographs from the 'Shared Reading'



9.23 Appendix W: Key Ideas from “Shared Reading” Workshop

Parent tips for ‘Shared Reading’ session

Ideas for reading at home:

Front cover:

- Start at the front cover and ask your child to describe what they see on the cover.
- Next ask them to guess what the story might be about.
- Read the author’s name.

Picture walk:

- Look through all of the pictures with your child.
- Do not read the words, just ask your child to try to tell what they think may happen in the story.

Rhyme:

- Ask the children to repeat the rhymes each time they come up in the book:
“We’re going on a bear hunt, we’re going to catch a big one”

Questioning:

As you are reading the book, ask some questions like:

- Why can they not go over the grass?
- Why do you think they cannot go under the river?
- What sound do you think the water might sound like?
- What can you see in the picture?
- Where do you think they will go next?
- How do you think they felt when they met the bear?
- Why do you think they are not going on a bear hunt again?

Look for ideas in the print:

- Can you see the tricky word 'the'?
- Can you find the letter 's'?
- Can you see a word with three letters?

Oral retelling:

- What happened after the family went through the grass?
- What was your favourite part?

Simon says can be used again to cover lots of different ideas when reading also!

- Simon says.... pretend you are the bear!
- Simon says.... pretend you are walking through the mud
- Simon says...pretend you are running through the forest

I- Spy can be used in the same way!

- **Colours**- I spy with my little eye a boy wearing a red shirt
- **Sounds**- I spy with my little eye an animal beginning with the sound 'b' (bear)
- **Letters**- I spy with my little eye the letter s (for example squelch)
- **Description of objects**- I spy with my little eye something that is fluffy (dog)
- **Rhymes**- I spy with my little eye something that sounds like a log (a dog)

Watch the book on YouTube!

- Scan the code for the video



SCAN ME

9.24 Appendix X: 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' Stick Puppets

These resources were obtained from Twinkl.ie, an educational resource website for educators.

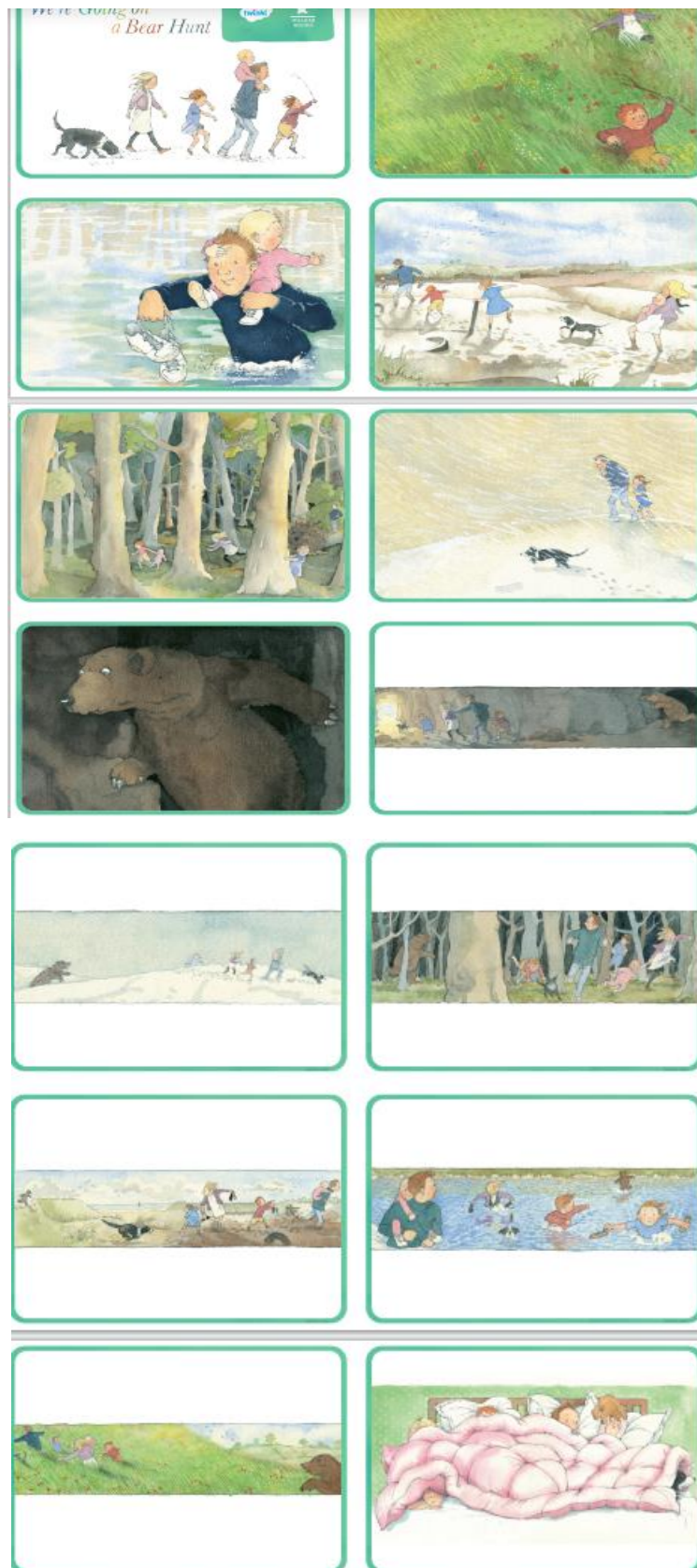
We're Going on a Bear Hunt



We're Going on a Bear Hunt



9.25 Appendix Y: 'Shared Reading' Sequencing Cards



9.26 Appendix Z: 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' translated into Arabic

"We're Going on a Bear Hunt" by Michael Rossen, translated into Arabic

This translation was done by Asyah, the parent who partook in the PEG and led the workshops in Arabic.

We're going on a bear hunt, We're going to catch a big one. What a beautiful day, We're not scared. Oh, Oh! Grass. Long, wavy grass. We can't go over it, We can't go under it, Oh no! We've got to go through it. Swishy washy! Swishy swashy! Swishy swashy! We're going on a bear hunt, We're going to catch a big one. What a beautiful day,	نحن نذهب في رحلة صيد الدب سنلتقط واحدة كبيرة يا له من يوم جميل! نحن لسنا خائفين أوه أوه! نجيل. عشب طويل مموج. لا يمكننا تجاوزها ، لا يمكننا الذهاب تحتها أوه لا! علينا أن نمر به. حفيف متقلب! حفيف متقلب! حفيف متقلب! نحن نذهب في رحلة صيد الدب سنلتقط واحدة كبيرة

We're not scared.	يا له من يوم جميل! نحن لسنا خائفين
	اه اه!
Uh-uh!	نهر!
A river!	نهر عميق بارد.
A deep cold river.	
	لا يمكننا تجاوزها ،
We can't go over it.	لا يمكننا الذهاب تحتها
We can't go under it.	أوه لا!
Oh no!	علينا أن نمر به!
We've got to go through it!	
	سبلاش سبلاش!
Splash splosh!	سبلاش سبلاش!
Splash splosh!	سبلاش سبلاش!
Splash splosh!	نحن نذهب في رحلة صيد الدب
We're going on a bear hunt,	سنلتقط واحدة كبيرة
We're going to catch a big one.	يا له من يوم جميل!
What a beautiful day,	نحن لسنا خائفين
We're not scared.	
	اه اه!
Uh-uh!	طين!

Mud!	الطين السميك
Thick oozy mud.	
	لا يمكننا تجاوزها ،
We can't go over it.	لا يمكننا الذهاب تحتها
We can't go under it.	أوه لا!
Oh- no!	
	علينا أن نمر به!
We've got to go through it!	
	سحق سحق!
Squelch, squelch!	سحق سحق!
Squelch, squelch!	سحق سحق!
Squelch, squelch!	نحن نذهب في رحلة صيد
	الدب
We're going on a bear hunt,	سنلتقط واحدة كبيرة
We're going to catch a big one.	يا له من يوم جميل!
What a beautiful day,	نحن لسنا خائفين
We're not scared.	اه اه!
Uh-uh!	
	غابة!
A forest!	غابة مظلمة كبيرة.
A big dark forest.	
	لا يمكننا تجاوزها ،
We can't go over it.	لا يمكننا الذهاب تحتها.

We can't go under it.	أوه لا!
Oh no!	علينا أن نمر به!
We've got to go through it!	
	رحلة متعثرة!
Stumble trip!	رحلة متعثرة!
Stumble trip!	رحلة متعثرة!
Stumble trip!	
	نحن نذهب في رحلة صيد الدب
We're going on a bear hunt,	سنلتقط واحدة كبيرة
We're going to catch a big one.	يا له من يوم جميل!
What a beautiful day,	نحن لسنا خائفين
We're not scared.	اه اه!
Uh-uh!	
	عاصفة ثلجية!
	عاصفة ثلجية دوامة.
A snowstorm!	لا يمكننا تجاوزها،
A swirling whirling snowstorm.	لا يمكننا الذهاب تحتها.
	أوه لا!
We can't go over it.	
We can't go under it.	علينا أن نمر به!
Oh no!	هوووووو!
	هوووووو!
We've got to go through it!	

Hooo wooo!	هوووووو!
Hooo wooo!	نحن نذهب في رحلة صيد
Hooo wooo!	الدب
We're going on a bear hunt,	سنلتقط واحدة كبيرة
We're going to catch a big one.	يا له من يوم جميل!
What a beautiful day,	نحن لسنا خائفين
We're not scared.	اه اه!
Uh-uh!	كهف!
	كهف ضيق قاتم
A cave!	لا يمكننا تجاوزها ،
A narrow gloomy cave	لا يمكننا الذهاب تحتها.
We can't go over it.	أوه لا!
We can't go under it.	علينا أن نمر به!
Oh no!	رؤوس أصابع!
We've got to go through it!	رؤوس أصابع!
	رؤوس أصابع!
Tiptoe!	ما هذا!
Tiptoe!	أنف رطب لامع!
Tiptoe!	

WHAT'S THAT!

One shiny wet nose!

Two big furry ears!

Two big goggly eyes!

IT'S A BEAR!

Quick!

Back through the cave!

Tiptoe! Tiptoe! Tiptoe!

Back through the snowstorm!

Hoooo woooo! Hoooo woooo! Hoooo
woooo!

Back through the forest! Stumble trip!

Stumble trip! Stumble trip!

Back through the mud!

Squelch, squelch! Squelch, squelch!

Squelch, squelch!

اثنين من آذان فروي كبيرة!

عينان كبيرتان!

إنه دب!

سريع!

مرة أخرى من خلال

الكهف!

رؤوس أصابع! رؤوس

أصابع!

رؤوس أصابع!

مرة أخرى من خلال

العاصفة الثلجية!

هوووووو! هوووووو!

هوووووو!

مرة أخرى عبر الغابة!

رحلة متعثرة! رحلة متعثرة!

رحلة متعثرة!

مرة أخرى من خلال الطين!

سحق سحق! سحق سحق!

سحق سحق!

Back through the river!

Splash splosh! Splash splosh! Splash
splosh!

Back through the grass!

Swishy swashy! Swishy swashy!

Swishy swashy!

Get to our front door.

Open the door.

Up the stairs,

Oh no!

We forgot to shut the door.

Back down the stairs.

Back upstairs.

Into the bedroom.

Into the bed.

Under the covers.

I'm not going on a bear hunt again.

مرة أخرى عبر النهر!

سبلاش سبلاش! سبلاش

سبلاش! سبلاش سبلاش!

مرة أخرى من خلال

العشب!

حفيف متقلب! حفيف متقلب!

حفيف متقلب!

اذهب إلى بابنا الأمامي.

افتح الباب.

أعلى السلالم،

أوه لا!

لقد نسينا إغلاق الباب.

تراجع الدرج.

عودة الطابق العلوي.

في غرفة النوم.

في السرير.

تحت الأغطية.

	أنا لن أذهب لمطاردة الدب مرة أخرى.

Observation Rubric for Parent Classes

Week 3

Week 3

"Literacy in the home \ Shared reading"

[illegible]

Notes:

- Finger puppets very effective - especially for EAL parents
- Parents + kids using sequencing cards + matching to pictures in the book - encourage oral retelling
- Some connections made to other books read
- Kids very engaged mostly
- Rhyme element more successful - structure
- ~~Translator~~ = super - very effective + inclusive

9.28 Appendix BB: Non-Identifiable Photographs from the 'Library Visit'
Session

